

Contemporary History in Faces

A. Tamkovich

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Aliaksandr Tamkovich
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The book contains political essays about people who are well known in Belarus and abroad and who had the most direct relevance to the contemporary history of Belarus over the last 15 to 20 years. The author not only recalls some biographical data but also analyses the role of each of them in the development of Belarus.
And there is another very important point. The articles collected in this book were written at different times, so today some changes can be introduced to dates, facts and opinions but the author did not do this INTENTIONALLY. People are not less interested in what we thought yesterday than in what we think today.
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AUTHOR'S PROLOGUE

Probably, it is already known to many of those who talked to the author "on tape" but I will reiterate this idea. I have two encyclopedias on my bookshelves. One was published before 1995 when many people were not in the position yet to take their place in the contemporary history of Belarus. The other one was made recently. The first book was very modest and the second book was printed on classy coated paper and richly decorated with photos. However, many heroes of this book are absent from there, or information about them has been censored very much, to put it mildly.

I am certain that it should not happen in this way. Therefore, this book is an attempt to document today's realities and stories about fate of those who created the past and is creating the future of Belarus. I would like to be wrong but decades and centuries later, our descendants will not know what actually happened in our times.

It already happened in the Soviet history, so I would like very much to avoid repetition of this in the Belarusian history...

Unfortunately, many of those who have the right to be in this book have already gone to the better world. And I regret very much that I was not able to record memories of Barys Zvoskau, Vital Silitski and Viktar Ivashkievich. May they rest in peace and may the memory of them live forever. The names of these people remind us again that all of us have to hurry to document our time.

The idea of the "Contemporary History of Belarus" was put up in 2005 by Aliaksiej Karol, the editor of "Novy Chas", so he can be seen as a co-author of this book. Especially taking into account the fact that almost all articles were published in "Novy Chas". Certainly, with the exception of those that were published in another newspaper, "Svobodnyje Novosti Plus", which is also very close to my heart.

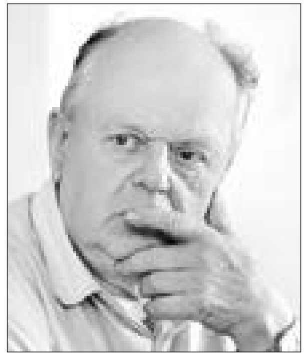
And there is one more thing. It makes sense to name the person who was directly involved in all my twenty books that have been published to date. This is my wife Iryna. She has every right to be a heroine in each of them.

TO MY WIFE IRYNA


ДЗЯДЫ

FROM THE BOOK "PERSONALITIES"

STANISLAU SHUSHKEVICH, SPEAKER OF THE SUPREME SOVIET OF BELARUS



Prepared for publication on 12.08.2007

It is a paradox, but Shushkevich sustained a defeat exactly at that very moment, when he was appointed at the position of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. To my mind, it was a Pyrrhic victory. Quite a few people out of those, who worked at the Belarusian Parliament, the one which declared the Declaration of State Sovereignty, noticed that after Stanislau Shushkevich had gained the victory over Mikalai Dziemiantsiei, the temporary Speaker, he really quitted down. A. Sasnou, a former deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation, who doesn't consider Shushkevich to be the strongest politician, narrated how he had warned about the inevitable nomenclature revenge. Moreover, he described precisely a possible scenario of substitution of legislative power in one of newspapers. And it happened exactly like this on January 28, 1994. It happened in exactly the same way as Sasnou had written about it. Unfortunately, Shushkevich was listening to some others at that time.

The author will not retell all the stages of biography of S. Shushkevich, born in Minsk in 1934. It's only worth mentioning that till 1990, when Shushkevich became the First Deputy to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, he had been known as a physicist and a nuclear engineer. At that time Shushkevich also claimed to occupy the post of the Chairman, but he lost the fight, since the experienced party nomenclature preferred to support a secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus instead of the protégé of the Communist Party Committee at the Belarusian State University.

In August 1991, he substituted Dziemiantsiei due to the support of the Belarusian Popular Front and against the background of the embarrased former Communist Party nomenclature, but in 1994, he himself was substituted by Miechyslau Gryb. Afterwards for some time Stanislau Shushkevich worked as the Director of the Center for Political and Economic Studies at the European Humanities University. With this "luggage" he took part in the first presidential elections and lost them in the first round. He collected only 9.9 percent of votes.

These events evoke a lot of discussions even now. The author agrees with those, who consider it should have been a single candidate on behalf of the democrats. But who could it be then? Could it be Z. Pazniak, who got 12.9% of votes? Together they collected more than V. Kebich, who passed to the second round with the killing amount of 17.4% votes.

Or maybe it was necessary to yield to Genadz Karpenka, whose image was attractive both for the nomenclature and the considerable part of voters. The representatives of the People's Concord Party approached Shushkevich with such a proposal. (The party was led by Genadz Karpenka and Viktar Ganchar at that time.) However, Shushkevich gave a categorically negative answer. Anyhow, the nomenclature was afraid of Karpenka and blocked him, having invalidated a part of signatures in his support at the Frunzenski city disctrict of Minsk. On the other hand, the deputies from the opposition of the Belarusian Popular Front withdrew their signatures for the nomination for the presidential candidate, too. The situation shows that the problem of falsifications and unity of opposition at least at decisive stages of political development of Belarus has always been a problem in the contemporary history of the country.

It's hard to give one simple answer to the questions about the lost possibilities. Nobody knows the answer.

A lot of important events took place during the period, when S. Shushkevich was the Speaker of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus. Let's highlight only some of them. It's worth mentioning that Shushkevich was the first Speaker in the popular sense. He could really speak properly and we never heard phrases about *"the back passage"* again.

The momentous meeting in Viskuli at the beginning of December 1991 became a fatal event for Shushkevich's political career. He was one of those *"Belavezha aurochs"* who *"messed up"* the Soviet Union. But

unlike Yeltsin and Kravchuk, who became heroes, quite a few people apprehended Shushkevich as a traitor.

The author understands pretty well the role of the personality in history and totally respects Shushkevich's courage, but it seems that his contribution to the whole matter is overestimated to some extent. To my mind, the USSR had to go to pieces. If Shushkevich did not do it, it would have fallen to somebody other's lot. Probably, it would have been Kebich, whose signature appeared under the *"Belavezha Accords"*, too. Disappearance of the Soviet Union from the political arena was just a matter of time. The Soviet Union was simply condemned to disappearance sooner or later.

On December 8, 1991, the so-called *"Belavezha Accords"* were signed and the Union Agreement of 1922 was denounced. All these documents were ratified by the Supreme Soviet of Belarus on December 22, 1991.

However, it wasn't only that fact of Shushkevich's biography that led to his dismissal. It was his famous "compliancy" that played the fatal role. He always tried to maneuver between the nomenclature and the supporters of the Belarusian Popular Front. And he lost the absolute backing of the latter. As a result, when it was necessary to take a decision on his resignation, for which according to the time-limit two thirds of the votes were necessary, the nationalists didn't adhere to Stanislau Shushkevich. He could not be dismissed without their consent. However, the nomenclature part of the Supreme Soviet also voted for his resignation.

A similar story happened in mid-summer of 1993. Shushkevich himself considers that at the time he beat his opponents, who were short of some votes. However, there was also another factor that saved the situation. A visit of the US President Bill Clinton to Belarus was planned at that time. Therefore, resignation of almost the first official in the country was rather undesirable.

Clinton spent only 8 hours in Belarus. However, he managed to do a lot. For example, he visited Kurapaty, where he opened a famous monument, repeatedly attacked by offenders later on. Shushkevich was standing close to Clinton and a lot of people noticed that his eyes were not sparkling. May be he understood that his opponents at the Supreme Soviet would not quiet down and that their next attempt would be more successful. Such politicians are called *lame ducks* in the West.

Generally speaking, Shushkevich himself was guilty of his dismissal. He lost the support of the Belarusian Popular Front, and besides he made one more mistake. He supported the proposal of Anatol Liabedzka to appoint the MP Aliaksandr Lukashenka as the Chief of the famous Anti-corruption Committee. Later both of them paid for it. And Shushkevich was the first one. I do not think that the main reasons were the Lithuanian communists Burakavichus and Ermalavichus, or the famous "box of nails”. As Vladimir Vysotski sang, "They wanted to eat and ate Cook”.

I want to remind the story about the nails. Shushkevich had two dachas. The state one in Drazdy, which he almost never visited. He conducted some meetings of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet there. The second dacha was a private one, which was allotted to all MPs in the Negarelaye area. The Shushkeviches built their own house there. While it was plastered, according to Lukashenka, "the abuse of power" took place. The Committee stated that more nails were *"written off"* than it was necessary.

Afterwards, the investigative commission came to the conclusion that the accusation had been wrong, but the place of Shushkevich was already occupied by Gryb.

The Speaker of the Supreme Soviet of those days had rather big power in his hands. It was not the power in the hands of one person, i.e., the individual power, of course. That is why it demanded from him aspiration and abilities to generate new ideas, to search for and unite allies, to look for friends and avoid turning them into enemies. The conservative part of the nomenclature felt itself rather shaky, due to the political situation in the country and around it at that time. At the same time, the more advanced part of nomenclature agreed to reforms, and the opposition obtained the systematic status. The Speaker of the Supreme Soviet had all preconditions to win support of the majority of the deputy corps in that situation. There were opportunities to initiate and adopt laws that would have formed institutions of a new democratic system of power and to prevent it from rolling back. The Speaker Shushkevich did not see these opportunities. The MP Siargei Navumchyk wrote about one of his visits to the Speaker Shushkevich together with Zianon Pazniak in the article, published by *The Narodnaya Volia*. The opposition leaders heard only the negative response to all their proposals for concrete actions.

Thus, there was prepared the ground for a popular leader to get access to power on the new ground of people's disappointment both in the old nomenclature and in the new democrats.

Facing hardly any particular difficulties, Shushkevich became the deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation in 1995. However, even when the new Parliament happened to be in disgrace, he didn't manage to be the Speaker again. Moreover, nobody even perceived his candidature seriously.

In June 1996, the first split of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Gramada happened. M. Statkevich's supporters united with the People's Concord Party. And in January 1997 the Ministry of Justice closed the Belarusian Social-Democrat Gramada The People's Gramada"). In March 1997, a committee was established to restore the former Party. Following A. Trusau's suggestion, Stanislau Shushkevich took the party leadership, though he had not been a member of the liquidated Party before. Later on, he took leadership of the small Belarusian Social-Democrat Gramada. He has been the party leader till the present moment.

ZIANON PAZNIAK, LEADER OF THE BELARUSIAN POPULAR FRONT



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The author would like to note from the very beginning that he respects Zianon Pazniak's achievements and considers him to be one of the most influential Belarusian politicians in the last two decades. His name has already gone down in the history of Belarus. He was the leader of the first post-Soviet wave of democratization that led to the establishment of Belarus as an independent sovereign state. He was at the sources and he was the recognized leader of the democratic movement named the Belarusian Popular Front, which represented the discontent and protest of the whole society by the decayed Soviet totalitarian system. He was the main opponent of the leading Party nomenclature, which had to take him into consideration, and to which the nomenclature lost the first round, in spite of its commanding positions. The leader of the opposition Zianon Pazniak and the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus were symbolic personalities at the end of eighties and the beginning of nineties of the 20th century, representing the new generation and the old rule, correspondingly.

Still, the author expects that the essay may cause hot protests, but the author believes that Pazniak can be definitely regarded as *"the chief voter for Lukashenka"*. No doubt, it is Pazniak, who is guilty of what is happening now. It was him, who had pushed away a lot of potential supporters from the Belarusian Popular Front due to his radicalism. If only these were solely the nomenclature representatives! They say that when Pazniak was informed about a possible victory of Lukashenka at the first presidential elections, he was laughing heartily for a long time. That was not his last mistake.

Unfortunately, the disease of authoritarianism, infallibility, and one's own exclusiveness in post-totalitarian societies does not miss the democratic opposition and its activists.

Some time passed, and Pazniak turned from one of the most perspective national leaders to a marginal icon. Even his most ardent supporters understood that fact and agreed to a split. They did not have any other alternative. The authority of the Belarusian Popular Front in the society was quickly dropping. A lot of quite respected people were leaving the political organization.

And there is another thing to be mentioned in this respect. From the very beginning Pazniak was considered to be a Russophobe and anti-Semite that was proved by his statements in the corresponding interpretation, disseminated by the official propaganda. A politician should be very considered and cautious in his public speeches, he/she must know when and what to say, and he/she should not give pretexts for undercurrent interpretations. Zianon has always lacked these features. He also lacked political correctness, especially with respect to his colleagues from the democratic camp. If one reads the articles by Zianon Pazniak in chronological order, it will be hard to find the name of a politician, even from among his former supporters, whom he did not blame for serious sins, including cooperation with the KGB. As a result, the Belarusian Popular Front lost a considerable part of voters.

Zianon Pazniak was born in the village of Subotniki, Iuye district, Hrodna region on March 24, 1944. By the way, there was one more well-known Pazniak, Zianon's grandfather. His name was Yanka, and he was also born in Subotniki in 1887. Yanka Pazniak was famous as a distinguished publicist as well as a public and cultural figure.

Zianon Pazniak started his working career as the head of Khilevichi village club. In 1969, Pazniak became a post-graduate student of the Institute of Art Studies, Ethnography and Folklore at the BSSR Academy of Sciences. Having defended his PhD thesis in Art Studies successfully, he started to work as a junior research worker of the Institute. In 1983, Zianon Pazniak was employed at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences.

On October 9, 1988, the article named *Kurapaty*. *The National Tragedy, about Which Everybody Should Know* was published in *The Moscow News* newspaper. Thanks to Pazniak, the whole world learnt

about the gloomy events that had happened in the forest near Minsk. Since that moment a new period of Belarusian history began, because the article appeared to be the very detonator that blew up a bomb of Soviet myths. The article was re-printed by the *Naviny* newspaper in ten years. Unfortunately, it has not lost its actuality even nowadays.

On October 19, 1988, the Organising Committee of *"Adradzhennie"* Belarusian Popular Front civil movement for Perestroika was established. The BPF Founding Congress gathered in Vilnius on June 24-25, 1989.

In 1993, the *Belarusian Popular Front* political party was founded. It was led by Zianon Pazniak.

There is no doubt that the abovementioned newspaper article helped to form the BPF, but it was not the main factor, indeed. The Front appeared, since it had to appear. The fact was that people were tired of the leading role of the CPSU, and foundation of independent public structures was an objective process.

The pre-election Belarusian democratic block was organized at the All-Belarusian Democratic Forum, held on the BPF initiative on January 10, 1990.

The block received 60 deputy mandates at the Parliamentary elections. Zianon Pazniak also became an MP by gaining a victory over Piotr Krauchanka, a secretary of Minsk City Committee at that time.

The so-called Democratic Club was founded at the Supreme Soviet. The BPF faction separated from it (37 deputies). Barscheuski, Golubeu, and Navumchyk became the faction coordinators, but everybody understood that the chief was Pazniak.

After the putsch failure in August 1991, our country was named the Republic of Belarus under the influence of the BPF. The Pahonia coat-of-arms and the white-red-white flag became the state symbols. Quite a few people regard it as the most important political victory of Zianon Pazniak.

At the beginning of 1992, an initiative group was organized under the aegis of the BPF to execute a referendum that had to decide the fate of the Supreme Soviet. 446,601 signatures were collected to support the initiative, but on October 24, 1992, the Supreme Soviet took a decision to ban the referendum. A lot of nomenclature MPs understood very well that they could lose their deputy mandates. Therefore, they acted against the conclusions of the Central Elections Committee.

The first presidential election was held in Belarus in the summer of 1994. Zianon Pazniak took only the third position in the first round. In a year, when he decided to come back to the real public politics, the authorities did not let him become a member of the Supreme Soviet. Although Pazniak won the elections, the authorities pretended they couldn't consider them to be valid.

The traditional *Charnobylski Shliakh* ("Chernobyl Way") rally was organized in April 1996. The author remembers that he wrote those days that he would not be surprised if we got to know in the course of time that somebody would have received extraordinary "stars" on shoulder-straps for Pazniak's emigration from Belarus. For some reason Siargei Navumchyk understood that the hint concerned him and avoided the author since then. Taking the opportunity, the author would like to mention that he didn't mean him at all.

It was very advantageous for the incumbent government to push Pazniak out of Belarus. The new regime hadn't been formed and consolidated yet to an extent that it could neutralize such a famous and influential opposition leader, in spite of the different attitudes towards him. The enkindled energy of people, the arisen feeling of pride and the feeling of freedom were not smothered yet by different prohibitions and repressions. His arrest would have called enormous mass street protests and a tremendous international response from the West and Russia, too. It is worth recollecting the wave of solidarity with the arrested Yury Khadyka and Viachaslau Siuchyk. Khadyka was released after a phone call from Boris Yeltsin.

Considering the *Charnobylski Shliakh-1996*, led by Zianon Pazniak, and the politician's speech in front of thousands of people who had come to the TV Center in Kamunistychnaya street, it is pretty obvious that he would have turned to the national leader if he dared stay in Belarus. However, no doubt, it was a high risk then. That's why nobody has a right to reproach Zianon Pazniak with his emigration. We should analyze and appraise the politician's words and actions before his departure and in emigration.

Pazniak moved from Poland to the United States, where he was granted a political asylum.

By these events his presence in *The Encyclopedia of the History of Belarus* comes to an end.

Later on Pazniak's participation in the Belarusian political life got limited only to letters and notorious fax messages.

The sadly known split happened in the BPF in 1999. Two parties were organized: one was named the Conservative Christian Party of the Belarusian Popular Front and the second was named the Belarusian Popular Front. Z. Pazniak has been the leader of the Conservative Christian Party since the day of its foundation till the present moment.

Personally, the author does not regard Pazniak's emigration as the politician's mistake. Moreover, it seems to be absolutely well-reasoned for that time. The mistake is that the emigration has lasted for so many years. The press reported several times on Pazniak's plans to come back to Belarus in the nearest future. Unfortunately, it hasn't happened so far.

As it is known, Pazniak stopped being the leader of the whole BPF after the so-called alternative presidential elections, but that was a problem of the BPF itself. The author is concerned about some other things. In particular, it should be mentioned that the former Prime Minister of Belarus Mikhail Chygir spent 8 months behind the bars, in two months after the famous *"Chygir Project"* letter by Pazniak had been published. The latter didn't find it necessary to apologize to Mikhail Chygir for that.

The author wouldn't like to share the personal attitude towards both parties that appeared from one and the same BPF stem. It is a different subject for discussion. It only goes without saying, that the incumbent regime has definitedly benefited from appearace of this political twin. The author believes that Pazniak should have gone aside, in order to keep the unity of his party organization.

MIECHYSLAU GRYB, GENERAL-DEMOCRAT



Prepared for publication on 11.09.2007

They became generals almost at one and the same time. And it was the only likeness. Gryb and Charhiniets chose different destinies. One of them began to fight against the regime in power. The second one chose the opposite way. He came over to the governmental side. Why? I hope one can find an answer in the essays.

From the very beginning, I would like to note that I respect Miechyslau Gryb. I respect him, because he learnt the Belarusian language quickly, being guided by consideration that the Speaker of the Belarusian Parliament should speak Belarusian. Miechyslau Gryb was the third Speaker of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. However, he was the first lieutenant-general in the system of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus. Even the Minister Peskarou at that time had shoulder-straps of major-general.

Before the work at the Supreme Soviet, the biography of Miechyslau Gryb had been quite typical of many Soviet high-rank functionaries. He was born into a poor rural family in the village of Savichy, Dziatlava district, Hrodna region. He began to work, when he was in the seventh form. He dug out peat, worked as a maintenance worker at a construction site and as a postman. On graduation from school, he entered the Fire Technical School in Lviv, Ukraine. Such a decision wasn't caused only by his children's dreams. It was also caused by the practical reckoning, since the students were dressed and enjoyed full boarding and tuition there. The young lieutenant was directed to Pliski district on graduation from the Technical School. In three years, he was directed to Vitsiebsk. He entered the Correspondence Department of Law at the Belarusian

State University, living and working in Vitsiebsk. Since that time his rather impetuous police career has started. In particular, he used to work as the deputy head of Vitsiebsk Regional Department of Internal Affairs, the deputy head of the whole regional department of internal affairs for Hrodna region, the head of the Kastrychnitski city district police department in Vitsiebsk. In 1981, Gryb had to be directed to Afghanistan to implement the "international duty", but he was not approved by the medical commission. Consequently, he was directed to Minsk as the head of Public Order Maintenance department. Four years later he was appointed as the head of all police in Minsk region. He was even given an apartment in Niamiha Street. But suddenly that decision was changed and he was directed as a chief policeman of Vitsiebsk region, where the work was in full swing on the so-called *"Vitsiebsk case"*.

In the author's opinion, exactly that case became the most significant point of M. Gryb's further destiny. He organized the corresponding headquarters, which everyday had meetings in his office. Miechyslau narrated that the red-colour armchairs had been soft there, but they turned black very quickly. The upholstery had to be changed. But the case was disclosed. When Genadz Mikhasevich, a serial killer was arrested, it was found out that on the whole there had been committeed 43 crimes, 13 out of them were considered disclosed, and according to one of the cases the "killer" was shot.

Some time ago, the author had an occasion to watch the official version of "*Vitsebsk case*". It is not a single second about Gryb in the film. As if he did not exist at that time in Vitsiebsk at all. But that case in combination with the name of Gryb came up several times during the aggravation of the political struggle. Particularly, during the last electoral presidential campaign, when Gryb headed headquarters of Aliaksandr Kazulin. Somebody was spreading rumours persistently and methodically, as if the "*Vitsiebsk case*" had fallen just on time, when it was Gryb, who headed the regional department at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The lie was produced professionally: the events chronology was just a little bit corrected.

The whole truth about the *"Vitsiebsk case"*, which had been revealed by Gryb, suddenly became unwanted by the Party leaders, first of all. The people, who were guilty of absolutely nothing, went out of prisons. Sick people, even blind they were. Gryb was openly hinted that it would have

been better if the killer did not live till the court hearings. Miechyslau Gryb did not dare do that. Consequently, his following general rank was delayed, and nobody from the investigating group was even awarded. Only some years later Gryb got to know by chance that all laurels of their job had been received by some KGB employees.

In 1990, Miechyslau Gryb was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Belarus (the BSSR at that time). And on February 1, 1994, he became the Speaker. It happened rather unexpectedly. The Party nomenclature, having majority in the Parliament, decided to change the Speaker, Stanislau Shushkevich at that time to deprive him of "administrative resources" for the elections period. So, Gryb was proposed to take Shushkevich's position. Firstly he refused. But the Party deputies were rather persistent.

On March 15, 1994, Gryb signed the first Constitution of the sovereign Belarus. Later on Aliaksandr Lukashenka emphasized several times, that it had been written "for Kebich". I would like to disagree with such a wording, which, in my opinion, is rather primitive and superficial. That Constitution was a democratic one. Though it gave President some significant powers, but anyway it did not allow him being a tsar. Maybe that's why it was changed two years later.

It took almost a month to approve the Constitution of 1994. At first, the *"age qualification"* did not allow Lukashenka to be a candidate. Of course, his companions were not satisfied with this reality. It was Gryb, who solved the age problem. One can only guess why he did it. Some people think one of the reasons was his fanatic confidence in Kebich's victory. Others believe that Gryb was looking farther ahead, wishing to make use of his step in due time.

Gryb was not on good terms with Lukashenka from the very start of his presidency. However, he didn't indulge in any public quarrels with him. He struggled against the authoritarian tendencies, fostered by the leader of executive power exclusively by legitimate and democratic methods.

It is well known that Lukashenka was dreaming about political power. That's why he broke legislation many times, but Gryb could not accept it as a matter of principle. It became a reason for the first appeal of the Supreme Soviet to the Constitutional Court in accordance with Resolution of September 7, 1995. On October 30, the Constitutional Court supported the parliamentarians, but that decision was ignored

by the government. Even the Constitutional Court itself did not stand the pressure. On November 22, 1995, it decided to explain its own decision. And in principle it meant the "reverse”.

There’s no doubt that later on Gryb was ashamed of his colleagues from the Constitutional Court for that deed. However, it was not accidental. They were still short of political knowledge at that time in order to understand that one-way compromise meant defeat. That was not the only experience. In February 1996, the Constitutional Court noted that Lukashenka had broken the Constitution 17 times for the period of his ruling.

Unlike Gryb, who was seeking justice at the Constitutional Court, Siamion Sharetski did not do it. He recalled all the appeals from the Constitutional Court, which had been directed there. It’s likely that Sharetski wanted to demonstrate his loyalty to the President, therefore but he wanted to come to a mutual understanding. It is worth mentioning that Miechyslau Gryb warned him, saying: "Siamion, you should learn by our own mistakes. Do not trust him; anyway he will deceive you”.

By the way, Gryb was also proposed to become a presidential candidate. He refused to take this step. Maybe, he realized his chances very well. Maybe, he simply did not want to create obstacles to Kebich.

The English people say that everyone has his own "skeleton in the closet”. Gryb’s "skeleton" was connected with a rather brutal attack on the opposition MPs in 1995. Everything started on March 11, 1995, when Zianon Pazniak called upon the opposition deputies to go on hunger-strike in the conference hall of the Supreme Soviet, protesting against the referendum, dedicated to change of state symbols, bilingualism, integration with Russia, and the possibility to abolish powers of the Supreme Soviet. At this conjuncture, all the other MPs refused to discuss the referendum issue at all. However, in a couple of hours the parliamentary buildings were said to be "mined". The opposition members were proposed to leave the premises. They objected to the request. Consequetnly, the notorious "cleanup" began at night. It was the first one, but not the last. The deputies were beaten black and blue. The whole operation was photographed. Thus, the government showed to the public that it would not be afraid of blood any longer.

The author bets Gryb did not watch the "movie" at that time. It was just in two hours after the incident that he continued the session. I

remember Gryb looked rather tired and embarrassed to some extent then. Apparently, he had been promised the operation would be peaceful.

As everybody knows, the Parliament stops its activity as soon as the elected MPs of the following convocation get to work. However, the Belarusian governmental authorities felt reluctant to wait for the moment. In particular, Gryb's bodyguards as well as his official car had been taken from him one month before his duties expired. Thus, it was openly demonstrated that the governmental authorities did not need a proper opening ceremony of the first session of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. Gryb did not expect anything else from them. He had managed to take a very important step before that happened: he delivered a speech on TV and asked the voters to come and take part in the second round of Parliamentary elections to the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. According to politicians' remarks, the request played a significant role in the fact that the elections took place, the necessary quantity of deputies was elected, and the Supreme Soviet was formed. The executive power did not want it happen at all. It was that very Supreme Soviet, against which Lukashenka was forced to struggle by means of substituting the fully-fledged legislative body with the "puppet" Chamber of Representatives.

Miechyslau Gryb was elected to the new Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation without any problem. However, he was not the Speaker any longer. Moreover, he even did not try to run for the office.

The arbitrary results of the Constitutional referendum were proclaimed in November 1996. It goes without saying that Gryb was not among those who were included into the structure of the Chamber of Representatives. And he was not even striving for that. He was one of those who on principle had expressed their opinion against Lukashenka's way of amending the Constitution.

It looks like the short period of Gryb's chairmanship at the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation was the main deed of his political life. He came to politics when he was fifty. He became the Speaker by the nomenclature consent, but against the old Communists' hopes he turned into a democrat. And in many respects due to his position and his efforts that very Supreme Soviet began changing into the real Parliament.

Gryb’s political activity did not come to the end then. However, the opposition politics had corresponding consequences. He was deprived of his attorney’s license, faced trials and fines, and suffered from the harassing presence of police officers at the staircase landing next to his flat.

He was among those few (or maybe even the only one) activists of the national level, who understood the role of parties and backed the multi-party system as one of the bases of the democratically organized society. He became a member of the Belarusian Social-Democrat party in 1996. The social-democrat values present a logical choice for the person, borned into a poor rural family.

Miechyslau Gryb led A.Kazulin’s election headquarters in 2006. In his opinion it was the last influential position, which led him to great politics. Later on Gryb voluntarily left the post to "give way to young people”.

The author knows that quite a few people treat Miechyslau Gryb rather critically. However, the author doesn’t share these sharp views, since one can respect Gryb for his vital and political choice only. He could be definitely "lured", it he wanted, but he made his choice. Therefore, the critics should think over the steps that they would take, if they were in Gryb’s shoes, first of all.

VIKTAR GANCHAR, CHAIRMAN OF CENTRAL ELECTION COMMITTEE OF BELARUS



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The fact that Viktar Ganchar was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and got into the initial close milieu of the first President of Belarus, who had just been elected, couldn't be regarded as a sign of their good relations. They did not like each other from the very beginning. Each of them sensed an obvious contrast rather well. It was absolutely understandable that these people would not exist close to each other for a long time. And it happened exactly like this in the future. However, apart from the noticeable polarity in their biographies, they had some similarities indeed. Thus, both of them were village boys in the distant past.

Viktar Ganchar was born in the settlement of Radzichava, Minsk region, on September 7, 1957. He was 56 not long ago. However, in our memory and in the memory of our descendants he will remain young, handsome and elegant forever.

It makes sense to single out two episodes from his short, but full of events and achievements, biography.

The first episode is as follows. Having graduated from a village school, Viktar Ganchar entered the Law faculty of the Belarusian State University. At that time, the faculty was not simply prestigious, it was super prestigious. Actually, it was corporative, closed, with the unbelievable competition, and besides good knowledge, it was possible to enter the faculty on great patronage only. He entered the University, due to his personal merits. During the entrance exams he answered in such a way, that the Chair of the Admissions Committee could not suppress his admiration. Apart from giving smart and correct answers,

Ganchar debated with arguments from different sources, even with the detailed quotations of classics, referring to a corresponding volumes and pages by heart.

The second episode is as follows. He took part in the pre-election struggle, prior to elections to the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. Apart from going against the official wish, he entered in direct competition with his direct boss, Rector of the Institute, where he had been working as an Associate professor. And he won the election.

These two episodes distinguish two top important features of his nature: his talent, given by God, and his independent, if not ambitious, character, based on his work capacity and desire for knowledge. He was in his element, when he was breaking through. He did not like to be the second one. Going upstairs, he leaped over two steps. He dashed from Minsk to Maladziechna (77 km), actively overtaking other cars, in just 45 minutes.

He liked to dress in the exaggeratedly elegant way. A village boy, but dressed like "a London dandy".

The author won’t go into details of all positions, held by Viktar Ganchar. They will be only listed for general understanding. After the University he worked as a senior researcher of the Institute of Philosophy and Law at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR, as an Associate professor of the Belarusian Institute of National Economy, the Head of Economy and Law Department of the BSSR State Economics Planning Institute, the first Deputy Chairman (Genadz Karpenka’s subordinate) of Maladzechna City Executive Committee, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Belarus, the General Secretary of the CIS Economic Court, and the Chairman of the Central Committee on Elections and Referendums.

The last record in his employment history book was really the last official one. And it was not by chance. Viktar Ganchar was rather dangerous for the regime in power. That’s why he was pushed out to the underground at first and "vanished" later on.

I would like to begin with the last line of his official biography, that’s why I would like to apologize for breaking the chronology.

On September 5, 1996, the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation appointed Ganchar the Head of the Central Election Committee of Belarus. According to the common opinion, shared by his friends, politicians, journalists, and even by researchers lately, that period was

really an hour of triumph for Viktar Ganchar that actually corresponded to the truth. When Ganchar was appointed the Vice-Premier on Social Issues, or when he worked as the leader of the CIS Economic Court, hardly anybody doubted that it did not correspond to Ganchar's ambitions. He was dreaming of something else. He wanted real power. And once, soon after Lukashenka was elected President, Ganchar confided to his close friends, "Well, now I have a five-year plan of my own".

When I hear reproaches, I always renounce them to apprehend in a categorical way. To my mind, such a position is a normal, professional feature for a politician. It's much worse when it is absent, because the real possibilities and the wish to win cannot be seen behind daydreams. Maybe, exactly due to that very obsession by power, A. Lukashenka has been standing firm for such a long period of time at the very top. Almost all his opponents dream to be the President, but few of them have the real potential to reach the goal. As people say, it is not enough to desire, it is necessary to be able to do something. Ganchar wanted and was able to reach the top position in the Belarusian political field.

It was only a question of resources. The purpose and the morality resources, the purpose and the democratic values were apprehended by Viktar Ganchar in their unity only. He believed that it was unreal to win and get the political power with the help of doubtful resources. He took it as an offence to dignity. What he needed, was not the fear of him, but the recognition of his virtues — i.e., his intellect, knowledge, abilities, and charm — by his colleagues, and by the folk in the long run. Ganchar's friends remember his phrase, which became an aphorism, "With a definite part of political cynicism I must say..."

However, he exceptionally appreciated exactness, consistency and promtness of executing the organized tasks. He underscored repeatedly that if he had some talent then it was the manager's skill. Such people cannot be dictators; they can become only leaders in the democratically organized societies.

As soon as Viktar Ganchar became the head of the Central Election Committee, he immediately visited a lot of electoral districts around the country. And he was literally shocked by dimensions of maturing and methodically prepared lies. But even in a more painful way he was shocked by the fact that nobody listened to his rather concrete and serious warnings. He told me after one of such trips that he had an

impression that not only the local leaders failed to listen to him. They felt reluctant to listen to him.

However, it is well known that it was very difficult to stop Ganchar when he set an objective and had a strong desire to reach it. The Constitutional Court of Belarus took a decision that the Constitutional referendum results would not be obligatory, following his urgent requests. The corresponding note was added to the voting ballots. Ganchar delivered a speech at the State Duma of Russia, in which he informed the Russian MPs about numerous violations and preparations for broad falsifications at the coming referendum. Putting it mildly, the country leaders did not like it, since they counted on either the support of neutrality of Russia on the issue.

Afterwards, Ganchar took part in *"The Hero of the Day"* TV program, where he declared that he would not sign arguable referendum results as the Chairman of the Central Election Committee.

Almost everybody considered this declaration as his biggest mistake. People say, he should have waited for a while to keep his position and that he should have delivered such a statement as soon as the elections were over.

It's hard to object to that suggestion, but being a PhD in Law, Ganchar had every right to take this step.

A famous politician and columnist Aliaksandr Fiaduta noted in his book *"Lukashenka. Political Biography"*:

"Ganchar was a lawyer. He saw Lukashenka cynically violating legality little by little, and he could not accept the situation".

On November 14, 1996, Lukashenka by his order dismissed Viktar Ganchar from his position. It was against the law. The President's safeguards carried him on their hands out of his office at the Central Election Committee. Neither Siamion Sharetski, the Speaker of the Supreme Soviet, nor Vasil Kapitan, the Prosecutor General of Belarus, responded on the conflict.

By chance, the author was in the same building, where the Central Election Committee was located, in half an hour after the incident. Ganchar was walking nervously along the hall and calling somebody all the time. I remember the short-haired napes of several dozen of colonel Tsesavets' subordinates, dressed in black jackets, like the commissars at the times of October coup d'etat in Russia. I remember the smell of dirty socks.

The so-called *"dismissal"* of Viktar Ganchar happened de facto, but it was registered de jure only several months later. It was only on January 10, 1997 that a corresponding record appeared in Ganchar's employment record book. It looked as if it had been Ganchar who was leading the Central Electoral Committee all that time, but not Lidzia Yarmoshyna.

It goes without saying, Viktar Ganchar found himself among those who had not admitted the results of the Constitutional referendum in November 1996. Moreover, he led a special Parliamentary commission that dealt with the investigation of anti-Constitutional actions, taken by A. Lukashenka. A corresponding report was completed. However, it did not become a catalyst of the national resistance, and even the opposition didn't meet it with any special response. The opposition was short of unity, due to the overwhelming mutual distrust and non-acceptance of each other. They didn't learn yet how to agree with each another, and how to put responsibility on the person, who lacked broad support, but was prospective enough for a common victory in the long run.

The episode with Ganchar's scandalous dismissal and the actual defeat of the Central Election Committee was almost the central authoritarian attack on democracy at that time. The opposition either did not understand the fact or was scared to perceive it. It was exactly at that time that the change from the system to the non-system opposition started. Finally, it became a tool for the struggle, but not for the victory.

When a protesting declaration was adopted on October 14, 1997, it did not influence upon the situation in the country. Everything ended with a slight panic among the state officials.

When criminal suits were brought against the Commission members, Ganchar understood that other politicians in opposition did not need such quixotry. That was a moment of real disappointment, and Viktar Ganchar disappeared from the Belarusian political scene for some time. He left for Lithuania, worked for some arbitration tribunal (according to other rumors, it was a consulting company). The author's attempts to find out more information and details were in vain.

Ganchar came back to the politics of his country almost in half a year. To be precise, he didn't come back on his own initiative, but on request of those MPs, who remained at the Supreme Soviet of the

13th convocation, in order to carry out new Presidential elections, in line with the legal norms of the initial Constitution of Belarus, adopted in 1994. He was needed as the Chairperson of the legitimate Central Election Committee, elected by the Supreme Soviet of Belarus. Such elections were carried out on May 16, 1999.

The author does not have any desire to support or argue with the people, who consider these elections, arranged by the Belarusian democratic opposition, to be adventurous. The author believes that the consequences of this event were of top importance: Lukashenka felt a real danger for himself. Mikhail Chygir happened to be behind bars soon afterwards. Also, Ganchar himself experienced all *"delights"* of the Belarusian Femida.

The tragedy happened on September 16, 1999. People saw Ganchar for the last time somewhere in the area of Fabrichnaya Street in Minsk at about 10.45 p.m. He was the Acting Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation at that time. Together with his friend Anatol Krasutski he left a sauna and *"disappeared".* He *"disappeared"* together with Krasutski and the cherry-coloured jeep Cherokee without a trace.

The author is not eager to dwell upon the details of this tragedy. A lot has been written about it. Something important should be mentioned in this respect though. Once, Ganchar visited the editorial office of *"Svobodnye Novosti"* weekly. He recollected some time later that when he had been leaving the office he met an old friend of his by chance. The friend had been working earlier for the KGB. His office was located at the same building. The friend greeted Ganchar saying, "And I wondered at whom the external surveillance was aimed!"

Christos Pourgourides, a PACE special rapporteur on Belarus came to a conclusion later that the incumbent regime representatives had had certain relation to the crime. Of course, the latter reject such conclusion, indeed.

The case of Viktar Ganchar is waiting for its thorough and objective investigation. No doubt that his life aspiration of establishing the democratic political system in Belarus will be realized successfully, sooner or later.

VALERY TSIKHINIA, CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF BELARUS



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The author would like to note that he won't express his private attitude towards this person on purpose. Therefore, the author would like to ask the reader to refrain from interpreting the essay as a kind of a political condemnation. History will put everything in its place. The author is sure that Valery Tsikhinia knows it very well. Therefore, he tries to justify his arguable steps by purely legal aspects.

Valery Tsikhinia was born on October 1, 1940 in the urban village of Kapatkevichy, Petrykau district, Homiel region. Having graduated from the Law department of Belarusian State University in 1963, he worked as a researcher at the Scientific Reseach Institute of Forensic Examination.
Tsikhinia was invited to work at the Public Prosecutor's office in 1966. At the beginning he held the position of the Assistant to the Regional Prosecutor there. Later on, he was appointed hold the post of the Assistant to the Public Prosecutor of Minsk, and the Public Prosecutor for Leninski City District of the Belarusian capital.
Since 1974, Tsikhinia started to work as a senior professor, an associate professor, the Dean of Law Department, and the Vice Rector on Educational Activity at the State Belarusian University.
In 1989, he was appointed to the position of the Minister of Justice of Belarus. The following year, he was elected an MP of the BSSR Supreme Soviet and left the position of the Chief Lawyer of Belarus.
During the same period of time, he was elected to the position of one of the secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. Tsikhinia started his party career, when the

CPSU experienced hard times. He was not lucky, dealing with the new challenges of life. As it is known, the Belarusian communists supported the August putsch, but the coup became a failure. And the people, who appeared at the Communist party front line at that moment, were made responsible for the whole affair, first of all. If the leader of the Belarusian Communist Party Malafeyeu was pulled from the tribune, Tsikhinia was simply not allowed to enter the building. He had a heart attack, and some people from the Belarusian Popular Front saved his life.

Tsikhinia stayed in hospital for a long time after the incident. Perhaps, he was really sick. Perhaps, he tried to hold a pause.

Since 1991, he worked as the Head of the Department of Law at the Academy of Management that functioned under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of Belarus. And in 1993, he was appointed to the position of the Deputy Chairman of the Highest Attestation Commission.

On March 15, 1994, Miechyslau Gryb signed the first Constitution of Belarus. Valery Tsikhinia was elected to the post of the first Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus in a short while. It was the position, where his rise and fall took place. In the author's humble opinion, the position of the Chairman of the Constitutional Court was the goal of all Tsikhinia's life.

The opposition between the young President Lukashenka and the Supreme Soviet began immediately. Therefore, Valery Tsikhinia became one of the most important personalities in the country. He was not the only one, who understood his role correctly.

Thus, when the President only started to build his famous *"vertical of power"* and elaborated some significant amendments to the Law on Local Government and Self-Government, it caused the corresponding reaction on the part of some MPs, and they appealed to the Constitutional Court of Belarus. It was the first sharp judicial conflict between the powers. A. Lukashenka even interrupted his holidays in Sochi, came back to Minsk, and personally came to the Constitutional Court of Belarus. A friendly talk happened there, judging by the fact that at the end the participants even took a picture altogether. No surprise that the Constitutional Court of Belarus dismissed the MPs' address as a result of the meeting. Thus, the first victory had been gained even before the war started.

However, it did not result in complete consent in the future. Thus, A. Lukashenka violated the Constitution of Belarus 17 times during two years of existence of the Constitutional Court of Belarus. The President's opponents understood the real value of Tsikhinia's position, too. It wasn't by accident that they made hints to Tsikhinia that they would support his candidacy at the following presidential elections.

It was the time, when the Belarusian politicians just started to learn a new English word "PR", but they did exactly what the word means. Tsikhinia was quite active himself in this respect. He proposed journalists to interview him and organized a real media-conveyor. Once when the author was leaving Tsikhinia's office, he met a colleague from *The Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta*.

The main battle happened around the Constitutional referendum in November 1996. It should be reminded that the President Impeachment process was initiated by a group of MPs at that time. It was personally V. Tsikhinia, who stopped it.

The former Minister of Internal Affairs Yury Zakharanka brought signatures, collected to start the impeachment, to the Constitutional Court of Belarus. Anatol Mardashou, the head of *"Belnaftachim"* concern appeared in Tsikhinia's office immediately afterwards. Only two of them know what he said to Valery Tsikhinia, but the latter dashed to the Presidential Administration as soon as the meeting was over. On coming back, he proposed to refrain from taking any decisions for some time. However, nobody listened to him, since the judges were indignant. It was an urgent issue. Tsikhinia had to entrust Mikhail Pastukhou as a judge-speaker to prepare the meeting.

That moment can be considered as a culmination point in the history of modern Belarus. From the very beginning, there was settled an agreement with Tsikhinia that the names of MPs, who had initiated the Impeachment process would remain unknown for the public. It was supposed that only their quantity would be announced to confirm the constitutional validity of the initiative. Therefore, the judges were dumbfounded, when they saw the names of signees in the prepared papers. Moreover, somehow that list happened to appear at the Presidential Administration. It was obvious for practically everyone that it had been done by Tsikhinia. However, let's leave the question for historians.

In the author's opinion, it wasn't so important, who had violated moral norms. It was much more important to witness the consequences of

this promulgation of sensitive information. The consequences included pathetic words, blackmailing, and pressure. Some MPs were crushed, but the majority kept to the principle.

An MP Ivan Kruk narrated that every night a car had come close to the building where he lived and the driver directed headlights at the windows of his flat till the morning.

One more disgusting case is known. A deputy, who suffered from cancer, had an alternative to take back his signature or forget the medical treatment.

The Impeachment was scheduled on November 22. However, it didn't take place, allegedly, for the lack of the required quantity of signatures. The author finds it hard to agree with Tsikhinia's logic. The latter said that only 27 signatures remained in the list. The number was mentioned in Tsikhinia's interview to *The Narodnaya Volia* on September 3, 2005. There were 73 signatures under the appeal at the very beginning, when General Yury Zakharanka brought it to the Constitutional Court. As soon as it became clear that the incumbent ruler was not going to fulfill the agreements, two more MPs added their signatures to the list. One of them was Siamion Sharetski. As a result of the targeted pressure on MPs, the number of signees reduced by 12 people, the judge of Constitutional Court M. Pastukhou said. Even if we multiply the quantity by three that is hardly probable, we will not get the result stated by Tsikhinia. Thus, on the one hand, there wasn't left the required number of 70 signatures. On the other hand, Tsikhinia's figures cannot be regarded as trustworthy either.

The meeting of the Constitutional Court of Belarus did not take place. The lack of signatures was not the reason for its cancellation, though. On November 21, a group of Russian *"negotiators"*, including Chernomyrdin, Stroyev, and Selezniov, came to Minsk. The talks took place in Vaiskavy lane at night. The President's side was represented by Lukashenka, Miasnikovich, and Vasilevich. The Supreme Soviet was represented by Sharetski, Kaliakin, and Karpenka. The latter were simply shocked on seeing Tsikhinia in the room for negotiations. The head of the Constitutional Court of Bealrus insisted on his presence. He literally forced Sharetski to sign the agreement as soon as possible.

Tsikhinia proposed his colleagues to refrain from starting the Impeachment procedures on the following morning, but they refused.

Then he postponed the beginning of the meeting and asked for some time for the Supreme Soviet to recall the signatures. The meeting took place in the evening only.

As it is known, the agreement was not fulfilled and the Impeachment threat appeared again. However, Tsikhinia was not in a hurry and appointed the meeting on November 26, 1996.

The referendum took place on that very day. Lidziya Yarmoshyna summed up quickly the results on the following day. On November 26, Lukashenka signed a law that closed the Impeachment procedures. Tsikhinia got nothing for his loyalty.

When he was appointed the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, he promised Lukashenka that there wouldn't be any Impeachment under his rule. He fulfilled his promise.

The author will not ponder over the reasons of such behavior. However, some Tsikhinia's steps can hardly be regarded as adequate. Even the way of retiring from the position of the Chairman of the Constitutional Court caused a lot of questions.

On December 4, 1996, he held a press conference, where he declared that he had submitted an application for dismissal to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet that completely corresponded to the Constitution of Belarus. However, he submitted another application to the President on the following day of December 5th. The President signed it very quickly and Tsikhinia's chair was immediately occupied by Rygor Vasilevich, whose *"special opinion"* had always coincided with the intensions of the regime in power.

At the end, the author would like to underscore that Valery Tsikhinia was right saying that the country was changing into some judicial Chernobyl. However, it happened mainly due to the fact that somebody, who had to protect the Law, showed his complete disloyalty to the Law.



MIKHAIL PASTUKHOU, JUDGE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF BELARUS

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Sometimes there appear moments in the human life that require a deed. They happen especially frequently at the borderlines of epochs. The option is very clear: either the deed exists or the deed doesn't exist. It depends on the existence of a personality with the strong will and decisive civil position.

The former Chairman of the Constitutional Court of Belarus Valery Tsikhinia is a conformist figure. A judge of the Constitutional Court Mikhail Pastukhou is an opposition figure with the decisive standpoint, based on deep respect to the law. Both of them were perceived exactly like this during the Impeachment period that appeared to be a counterpoint of modern Belarusian crossroads with the options of going back to the authoritarian rule or moving forward to the rule of democracy.

When the Impeachment failed, Mikhail Pastukhou did not retire quietly, in order to be somehow adapted to the new realities. He did it openly and on principle. The author remembers a gathering of democratic public in the House of Literary Men that assembled spontaneously almost immediately after the sad news had been announced. And the author remembers Mikhail Pastukhou on a rostrum, who presented his version of events around the Impeachment, the violations of the Constitution and the currently valid legislation in his usual calm professor style. Incidentally, as if it was obvious, he announced his decision to retire in protest. He was doing and saying openly the things, which were dictated by his professional dignity and consciousness. He was risking his own status. He was risking his personal well-being and

the welfare of his family. It was exactly that ordinary everyday well-being that has always served for lots and lots of people as an excuse for their timeserving. It has always been one of chief obstacles on the way to changes and leaps to new levels of national development.

The author recollects the reaction of the people in the conference hall. They did understand the civic courage and perceived the Deed in piercing silence. It looked like the Deed had granted them optimism in a hopelessly pessimistic moment.

Since that moment Pastukhou's firm authority has been strengthening and firm respect to him has been growing. It's both the respect to a person and a professional lawyer.

Pastukhou's friends like to joke about him saying that Pastukhou's main drawback is the lack of drawbacks.

The author remembers the words said by the late driver of the Belarusian Association of Journalists D. Parfianovich, "Even to his friends' parties, dedicated to some events, Pastukhou comes as if to a formal meeting".

Here is a quotation from the zero issue of *The Bulletin of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Belarus*, dated January 20, 1994. (The Constitutional Court of Belarus did not exist at that time yet.) "Mikhail Pastukhou was born in the town of Surazh, Bransk region, on March 7, 1958. In 1980, he graduated from the Law Department of the Belarusian State University with honours. He defended a Ph.D. thesis in 1983. Mikhail Pastukhou worked as a junior research worker at the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus. Since 1985, he worked at the KGB Advanced Courses as a lecturer, a senior lecturer, an associate professor of the chair of Law disciplines, and a Deputy Head of the Scientific Research Department. In 1993, he defended a doctor's thesis and obtained the LL.D degree".

It was Mikhail's elder brother, who at that time studied at the Radio Engineering Institute, who persuaded him to enter the Department of Law at the Belarusian State University. One of his arguments was that Mikhail would not have any problems with the Belarusian language. And he was right; there were no problems with the Belarusian language at the end of the seventies same as nowadays. However, in spite of that, Mikhail Pastukhou deliveres quite often his speeches in the Belarusian language, though it is a little complicated for him.

M. Pastukhou worked for the Institute of Philosophy and Law in 1983. The BSU dean V. Tsikhinia proposed Pastukhou to stay at the University after he had defended the Ph.D. thesis. Viktar Ganchar, A. Matusevich, Siargei Leushunou, U. Zotka and others worked together with Prof. Pastukhou at that time. He liked the scientific activity, but he left it, suffering from low salaries. Being already married at that time and having a child, Pastukhou was not the only one who had been changing the place of work at the academic institutes for the positions of lecturers at institutions of higher learning. It is even surprising he was holding position for two long years.

The Higher Police School and the KGB Advanced Courses were especially attractive, since they proposed additional payment for the "stars" on shoulder-straps, too. It was impossible to enter the Higher Police School without good protection, and the Institution itself did not attract M. Pastukhou too much. One of Pastukhou's acquaintances proposed him to try to find a lecturer's position at the KGB Advanced Courses, but Prof. Pastukhou regarded the perspective rather skeptically, too. However, after a while he got a phone call from the head of one of the chairs, and later on from his deputy, too. Finally, Pastukhou was accepted to fill the lecturer's position at the KGB Advanced Courses. His salary increased twice.

When on July 27, 1990 the Independence of Belarus was declared, Mikhail Pastukhou had a dilemma: which country to choose for a new oath, Russia or Belarus. Pastukhou stopped on the latter one. Prof. Pastukhou was elevated to the rank of lieutenant-colonel in KGB.

In 1993, Prof. Pastukhou defended a thesis for a Doctor's degree. Afterwards, he was proposed to work on one of draft variants of the first Constitution of Belarus. Thus, Prof. Pastukhou got into the team of his former colleague, Viktar Ganchar.

On March 13, 1994, Prof. Pastukhou was awarded the title of the *"Honoured Lawyer of Belarus".*

An MP Dzmitry Bulakhau recommended Pastukhou as a candidate to the structure of the Constitutional Court of Belarus. Ural Latypau, who was a Deputy Chairman of the KGB Advanced Courses at that time, signed him a reference for this position. The Chairman himself did not take the risk.

Nine people, including M.Pastukhou became constitutional judges out of eleven proposed candidates. In such a way the life brought Prof. Pastukhou to his first fundamental choice in November 1996.
Exactly at that time there were collected the MPs' signatures, as required by the law, in order to remove Lukashenka from power. Quite a few of them heard the word *"impeachment"* for the first time then. However, they understood it could save the country. There was a real chance. Everybody felt that. Lukashenka felt it, too.
Unlike Tsikhinia, who was the Chairman of the Constitutional Court at that time, Pastukhou had his own opinion towards that issue. It was shared by the majority of judges in the Constitutional Court. The author is sure that if Valery Tsikhinia did not behave in such a "strange" way, there would be another leader of our country today.
Mikhail Pastukhou was the so-called judge-speaker. In other words, he prepared all decisions of the Constitutional Court. He literally forced Tsikhinia to appoint a meeting on the impeachment that the latter did not want to do at all on his return from the Presidential Administration. Moreover, following the night negotiations, Tsikhinia came to the morning session of the Constitutional Court on November 22 with a 20-minutes' delay and proposed to refrain from taking any decisions. He explained his wish with the agreements that "allowed to avoid a tragedy", reached at night. Pastukhou did not agree with him. Unfortunately, Tsikhinia ignored illegally Pastukhou's proposals and started to play for time. The meeting took place at 5 p.m., when on agreement with Sharetski the Constitutional Court received a letter from the Supreme Soviet of Belarus that denounced the impeachment procedure. However, even the letter didn't change the minds of six constitutional judges. Cessation didn't take place. Still, the time was lost.
The author has already described in details the dramatic events of those days in the previous essay. Therefore, it's no use repeating them once again. However, it should be noticed that Prof. Pastukhou was among the judges, who protected their position and constitutionality of all actions in the most decisive way.
On December 2, 1996, Prof. Pastukhou wrote an application for resignation to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet. As it is known, A. Vashkevich and V. Tsikhinia did the same, but the latter also submitted the same application to the President later on. Undoubtedly,

it strengthened the President's victory once again. Maybe, Tsikhinia was thinking about his possible pension and the received promises.

The author will refrain from reasoning the high moral standards. However, it's important to notice that the political situation in Belarus turned out in such a way that to some extent the destiny of the whole country depended upon the behavior of two lawyers, Valery Tsikhinia and Mikhail Pastukhou. And, in the author's opinion, Mikhail Pastukhou will never be ashamed of his actions. Due to his decisive standpoint, he contributed to approximation of the inevitable new turn of Belarus to a legal state.

Even after the resignation from the judge position at the Constitutional Court of Belarus, Prof. Pastukhou remained true to his deed. He kept his head high and he was not lost.

Due to his efforts, the Law Center for Media Protection at the Belarusian Association of Journalists was formed. Prof. Pastukhou led the Center for many years. The Center performs legal examinations of current laws, elaborates alternative bills in the media field. It also renders legal assistance to editorial staff members, journalists of independent editions, and freelance reporters in their struggle against the mechanisms of administrative and judicial persecution. Prof. Pastukhou has contributed a long list of articles on legal issues to the Belarusian independent media. It can be said without exaggeration that the articles foster development of democratic thinking in the Belarusian legal field. It will be requested in practice in due time. At the same time, Prof. Pastukhou's influence upon modern politics can't be undermined. It is the influence of a high-profile professional, who is well in place.

Once, the author asked Prof. Pastukhou about his favourite pastime. He answered he liked philosophy, historical literature, aphorisms, and the bath. Moreover, M. Pastukhou said that he was fond of listening to the Radio Liberty programs.

The author has been working as a journalist for more than twenty years. However, it was for the first time that he heard about such a hobby.

GENADZ KARPENKA, LEADER OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES



Prepared for publication on 23.10.2007

The author can absolutely agree with those people, who think that should Karpenka be alive, the official authorities would have had more problems. In any case, we would not hear all the disputes concerning the "unity" of democratic forces, or the "single" candidate, and the united opposition leader. Unfortunately, the history does not recognize the conditional mood.

The author believes that the very fact that Karpenka had the most real chance to become the second President of Belarus was the reason of his unusual and unexpected death. The essays in the book are usually started with the dates of birth. As for this one, the author would like to start it with Mr Karpenka's last years of life.

On March 24, 1994, the Central Election Committee registered 19 initiative groups, which started to collect signatures. Genadz Karpenka's team was considered to be among the most perspective ones. He was supported by the Party of People's Consent (*"Zgoda"*), which he led at that time. Also, he was backed by sport organizations and a group of directors of industrial enterprises. At the same time, he was the first candidate in the country, who engaged even the specialists that usually raised money on implementation of electoral technologies.

And he showed at his example that one could not count on such specialists in the Presidential election campaign.

The main quantity of signatures (about 80 thousand) was collected by rather weak and unstable structures of the emerging political party. 20 thousand signatures were collected by the sportsmen. 10 thousand signatures were collected by the rest.

The directors organized collection of signatures for Kebich, Lukashenka, and partially for Pazniak. According to Genadz Karpenka, they collected signatures for him, too. (The signatures were collected by the workers of enterprises.) However, the directors failed to provide Karpenka with the lists.

As a result, his initiative group submitted 110 thousand collected signatures to the Central Election Committee, but only 93 thousand of them were recognized as valid.

Out of 17 thousand deleted signatures, 11 thousand were *"rejected"* by the Election Committee of Frunzenski city district of Minsk. It was probably the first attempt of governmental authorities *"to deal"* with the lists of the most insecure rivals. The rest of the rejected signatures were allegedly *"registered with errors"* by those who worked for money. This way or another, Karpenka did not have a significant reserve of signatures to save the situation.

Genadz Karpenka had another chance to become a presidential candidate by means of collecting at least 70 signatures of Supreme Soviet deputies. He did it. However, he did not take it into consideration that the MPs' mood is just the same unstable as the weather in spring. It especially concerns the mood of those who depend on the Party-nomenclature instructions.

Shushkevich's supporters were the first to betray Karpenka. Later on, the members of pro-Kebich *"Zgoda"* faction let him down. Consequently, the list of signees decreased from 78 MPs to 64 deputies.

Thus, Karpenka could become a presidential candidate in 1994. However, he wasn't so eager to take the post.

He would never have such an opportunity again though. He was out of the question even at the so-called *"virtual"* presidential elections, which were announced by Ganchar.

The idea was proclaimed at a meeting of MPs, who remained at the Supreme Soviet opposition, in January 1997. Only Volga Abramava and Genadz Karpenka objected to Ganchar's proposals. There's a separate talk about Volga Abramava, but, in the author's opinion, Karpenka could not behave differently. Genadz Karpenka kept complaining about the betrayal of his closest friends.

Karpenka was considered to be a single leader of a considerable part of the democratic opposition. He was very popular in the United Civil Party. (Karpenka joined the party in 1996, since he had not managed

to reach an agreement on uniting the Party of People's Consent and the Belarusian Social-Democrat Party). The politician was elected to hold the position of a Deputy Chairman of the United Civil Party.

Moreover, he led the *"shadow Government"* and he had quite good chances to become the opponent number one, representing the Belarusian opposition at the following Presidential elections.

Unlike Pazniak, he was accepted by the nomenclature. First of all, he was quite popular among the so-called *"economic managers"*. And it wasn't by chance. Karpenka knew their life-styles, life preferences, and engagements very well. They trusted him and regarded him as their companion.

Karpenka graduated from the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute. On graduation, he worked in the scientific production field, dealing with powder metallurgy, for about seven years. For some time, he worked as the director of such an enterprise in Maladziechna, Minsk region.

Karpenka started the political career, due to winning the election to the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation.

In 1991, Karpenka was elected to the position of the mayor of Maladziechna. He held the position for more than three years. His other regalia commanded respect, too. Thus, he was Doctor of Technical Sciences and a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus, and an Honorary Research Fellow. Also, he received a number of state awards for his work.

Genadz Karpenka was the author of 50 inventions. His scientific findings were applied in 15 countries and marked with 5 medals. Among other, Karpenka received an honorary award for his *Contribution to the National Economy of the USSR.*

Briefly speaking, he made a fairly good impression in comparison with the former leader of one mediocre collective farm. His personality attracted representatives of different layers of Belarusian society. He was very popular with the opposition, too.

Actually, it was Karpenka who was at the sources of the process of unification of the Belarusian democracy. He was the initiator of the Congress of Democratic Forces. (He was elected its Chairman.) However, he was standing aside the elections, initiated by the opposition in 1999.

The former Prime minister, M. Chygir, came to the opposition at that time. Quite a few people from Karpenka's milieu started to work for

him. Some people think that the shift was caused by financial reasons. Being an eye-witness, the author can officially state that it was not like that at all. Chygir did not have a lot of money, either. However, a lot of people regarded him as a person, who can do some concrete things. Karpenka was a potential leader, but Chygir did absolutely real things. They were not competitors for sure.

There was a well-known case, when Uladzimir Kanaplou, Vice-Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives at that time, had a talk with Karpenka. Kanaplou was persuading Karpenka to abstain from taking part in Ganchar's *"affair"*, but he encouraged him to take part in the *"real"* presidential elections, which would take place in two years, instead. A lot of people believe that the talk had an enormous influence on his fate.

The circumstances of Karpenka's death evoke questions till the present time. On March 5, 1999, he was interviewed by a journalist at a café. She had asked for the meeting with him. All of a sudden, Genadz Karpenka went out, and when he came back, he had a stroke. He was taken home from the café. Afterwards, he was taken to hospital. He died at about 7 am on March 6, 1999.

The pathologists saw a rather big haematoma in the trepanned skull. They said that such haematomas appear either as a result of a serious head injury or after some chemical preparations… Nobody knows, when it could have happened. According to one of the versions, Karpenka felt bad much earlier.

It was the last day of Karpenka's life. The author would like to recollect the first day of his life, too.

Genadz Karpenka's mother narrated a quite interesting story about how she had got acquainted with his father. It happened just after the World War II. Vera Karpenka had just come back to her native Smaliavichy after the German captivity. The October revolution holiday was approaching. Her friend suggested her to go dancing to Kalodzischy, but there were no dances there on that day. And they went to a military settlement, where Vera got acquainted with Dzmitry. He came there to pick up the family of his commander from Japan. Having demobilized, Dzmitry Karpenka, whose first family had died in Leningrad some years before, moved to Smaliavichy and they started to live together. They moved to Minsk soon. Their son Genadz was born there on September 17, 1949.

They had been living in a communal flat for 16 years before getting a one-room apartment.
Karpenka started his political career at the end of the eighties from the positions a deputy and a Presidium member at the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. In 1994, he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation, where he was the Vice Speaker till he died.

MIKHAIL CHYGIR, PRIME-MINISTER IN OPPOSITION



Prepared for publication on 26.10.2007

The author is going to begin this essay with correction of a widespread mistake. It is written in The Encyclopedia of the History of Belarus that Mikhail Chygir was born in the village Usava, Kapyl district, on May 24, 1948. It is only the date that is true out of the whole phrase. However, the Encyclopedia shouldn't be blamed for that.

Once Mikhail Chygir told the author that as a matter of fact he had been born in a small settlement Bratski with only 12 houses, located in almost one kilometer from Usava. The future leader of the first Government of the first President of Belarus was born into a rural family there. His mother Anastasiya went to milk a cow and gave birth in a cow-house. She brought him home in her skirt hem. She was knocking against the window for a long time, but his father Mikalai did not wake up. He was sleeping like a log. He was 49, and she was 36.
It was the second marriage for Mikalai Chygir. His first wife came back from America for a private visit, but she was not allowed to go back to the United States. She died in the BSSR.
Mikhail Chygir recollected they had not written the name *Bratski* even on envelopes, because postmen were mistaken very often and carried letters to the village Bratkava instead.
Looking at Chygir, it's very difficult to believe that once he played basketball at a school team, but it is true. His teacher in physical training believed that there should be somebody frisky in every team.
It is stated in the above mentioned *Encyclopedia* that Chygir graduated from the Belarusian Institute of National Economy in 1970. However, one cannot say that he dreamt about becoming a banker. Chygir was keen on Maths a lot.

He even visited the Maths Department at the Belarusian State University, and there he learnt that there existed the "Banking" specialization at the National Economic Institute. It was necessary to pass written and oral exams in mathematics. Moreover, he had to take an entrance exam in geography and write a composition. Chygir wrote the latter in short sentences to make fewer mistakes.

By the way, he got acquainted with Tamara Vinnikava there. The latter *"ate up"* Stanislau Bahdankievich many years later. Being one of Belarus leaders, Chygir was against her appointment. It was not only due to the fact that he had seen her "expressing her special opinion" every now and then or quoting Lukashenka’s earlier speeches.

According to the official biography, Chygir started his professional activity in 1973, when he headed Kletsk Branch of the State Bank of the USSR, but the information is not accurate.

Having graduated from the National Economic Institute, Mikhail Chygir was directed to Saligorsk, and afterwards he was transferred to Biarezina. From Biarezina he was drafted to the army, since the Military Chair didn’t function at the National Economic Institute. He served in the air-forces in Ivano-Frankivsk, Western Ukraine. After the demobilization, Mikhail Chygir was directed to Kletsk, where suddenly the position of the head of the local bank department had become vacant subject to the previous director’s suicide. Thus, being 25 years old, he became the youngest head of a bank branch in the network of the largest bank of the USSR.

Mikhail Chyhir met his future wife Yulia in Kletsk. It is interesting that some time earlier a Gipsy woman had foretold Yulia, that despite having a boyfriend she would marry her colleague who would be a very prominent leader in the future. It happened exactly like this.

Chygir himself told the author how he had chosen Yulia. Being the head of the bank branch, he had an official three-room apartment. The New Year holiday celebration was coming, and Chygir proposed his flat for arranging a party with colleagues. There were only two women, who came back to wash up dishes in the morning after the party. One of them was Yulia Babiak.

Some people blame Chygir for "being henpecked”. The author is convinced that it is a primitive approach. It goes without saying that Chygir takes his wife’s opinion into consideration, and there is absolutely nothing extraordinary or bad about it. However, he is the

only decision-maker in the family. It is not a rare case that the wife is not fond of the taken decisions at all. Thus, e.g., she was against her husband's decisions to become the Prime Minister and take part in the so-called *"virtual"* elections.

It was the well-known liberal democrat's mother Galina Gaidukevich, who started disseminating the fairy tale about the "henpecked" Chygir. She was a very influential person in the banking field at that time, i.e. in the 1970 — 1980-ies. She articulated the story in her interview to *The Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta* in August 2001. However, the author is convinced that there is nothing serious apart from rumors and gossips behind it.

Mikhail Chygir was invited three times to a highly prestigious special faculty of Moscow Financial Institute. Suffice it to say that almost all graduates of this Institute were directed to work at foreign branches of Soviet banks.

Chygir could even get an apartment in Moscow, but he preferred Minsk to Moscow. He did not want to depart from Belarus and he could not leave his parents. At that time, his father was already 81. (He died in the age of 87.) His mother was 69. "What have we done wrong to you that you propose us to move to Moscow or going to abandon us?" they said to him.

At first, Mikhail Chygir worked for Moscow branch of the State Bank of the USSR. Later on, he transferred to the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the BSSR. Afterwards, he became an instructor of the Economic section at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus.

In 1986, he decided that the Communist party career was not for him, and he became a banker again. To be precise, he became the head of Minsk City Office of the same State Bank, because it was the only one in the BSSR. In 1988, he was transferred to the position of the First Deputy Director of Agraprambank. Aftewards, he was appointed to the position of the *"Agraprambank"* Chairperson. In 1994, Chygir was invited to take the position of the Prime Minister of Belarus. Some people say that it was a kind of compensation for the financial support to A. Lukashenka at the elections.

However, the author adheres to the version, expressed by L. Sinitsyn. The latter once noted that Chygir had not given any money, and that he led the Government, since Lukashenka didn't regard him as a competitor.

The version seems to be trustworthy, since Chygir has never raised this issue. He didn't mention it even being behind the bars.

It is known that the first conflict between Chygir and Lukashenka appeared at the beginning of November 1994, when the Government pushed up prices almost for all important products of consumption in order to save the domestic industry.

On November 11, 1994, Lukashenka abruptly returned from Sochi and in front of TV cameras he ordered the Government to cancel its decision until 10 am of the following day. He also promised to follow up the decision on TV. Neither of these actions happenned, though.

They did not manage *"to crush"* Chygir, though they wanted it so much. Five minutes before the abovementioned period expired, the famous *"grenade-thrower"* Viktar Kuchynski had entered Chygir's office, where the Government meeting took place. He declared that he would apply a special detachment, if the President's demands were not fulfilled in time. The sense of Kuchynski's words remains to be unclear for the Government members even nowadays.

Chygir resigned in protest against the constitutional coup d'etat in Belarus in November 1996. All members of his Government promised to support him. However, it was only the Labour Minister Aliaksandr Sasnou, who kept the promise.

Chygir did not give any comments or interviews during the whole year afterwards. They say, he had promised it to Lukashenka. The author tried repeatedly to get in touch with Chygir at that time, all in vain.

In 1998, he became the Head of the European CEA concern representation in Russia. He was paid USD 10,000 per month. Later on, he participated in the *"virtual"* presidential elections. Consequently, he was imprisoned for 8 months.

The author wouldn't like to dwell upon the situation at that time. However, it's worth mentioning Chygir's words in this respect, "Ganchar's and Sharetski's statements did not correspond to the reality. However, I got it clear only as soon as I started to take part in the alternative presidential elections".

Moreover, they proposed Chygir to invest all his earnings to finance the whole affair then. He was told that the money would be returned to him as soon as the political battle was won. Unfortunately, nobody has returned anything to Chygir up till now. It appeared that Chygir had paid for getting behind the bars...

On December 5, 1998, Chygir delivered a statement about his participation in the campaign. In February 1999, an auditing commission was organized to control the *"Agraprambank"* bank during the period, when Mikhail Chygir used to work there.

In the middle of March 1999, 120,000 signatures were collected in his support, and in the evening of March 28, 1999, the Belarusian state TV channel informed the audience that he had stolen USD 1,000,000 and fled the country.

On March 31, 1999, he was registered as a presidential candidate. Still, it was his wife who received the certificate, because Chygir had been arrested on March 30. He was released from custody in 8 months only. It happened on November 30, 1999.

Mikhail Chygir was the first one to take a symbolic moral-political step by his resignation and by starting his decisive opposition activities. Mikhail Marynich and Aliaksandr Kazulin took the same step some time later.

Chygir is not engaged in politics any longer. Apparently, it is not for the reason of some fears. As for now, he does not see any point in it. Sometimes one can hear that Chygir lacks *"charisma"*. There is some truth in these words. However, he is a real economic manager. Unfortunately, such high-profile specialists in the field are rarely met in Belarus nowadays. In particular, it's worth reminding that the price for petrol 92 totaled 14 cents per liter during Chygir's premiership. The price is much higher in Belarus nowadays.



LEANID SINITSYN, TEAM CAPTAIN

Prepared for publication on 14.11.2007

Leanid Sinitsyn is roundly known as a captain of Lukashenka's election team. It is not only due to the fact that he used to be the head of Lukashenka's election headquaters. At the beginning of Lukashenka's presidency, Sinitsyn was regarded as a brainy guy and a strong organizer. He always invented something extraordinary then.

The author remembers once he attended a meeting with voters, arranged by Aliaksandr Lukashenka. The presidential candidate was standing on the rostrum, shaking a *"folder with compromising papers",* related to the country leaders, and promising *"to put all of them behind bars"*. Few people know that the folder was empty. Hardly anyone knows that the trick had been invented by Sinitsyn.
On October 4, 1995[1], Leanid Sinitsyn stopped running the Presidential Administration. On July 26, 1996, he left publicly the position of one of Vice-Premiers of Belarus.
The meeting of Belarus Security Council was held on that very day. Viktar Sheyman gave a rather critical evaluation to the work of the whole Government in general and the Prime Minister Ling in particular. Leanid Sinitsyn wanted to protect him, but he was not given a word. Consequently, Sinitsyn and Lukashenka quarreled in a rather tough way. When the meeting was over, Sinitsyn submitted immediately a request for dismissal to the President. The President summoned Sinitsyn in a couple of days and returned the request to him with a suggestion to think it over a little bit. Nevertheless, Sinitsyn refused to follow the advice since the decision had already been taken by him

[1] The dates in the essay have been confirmed by Leanid Sinitsyn to avoid mistakes.

and he was not going to build dictatorship. One of chief architects of Lukashenka's victory left the first President's political ship, since the model was different from the one he wanted to build. By the way, Sinitsyn is well known as a builder.

Leanid Sinitsyn was born in the town of Polatsk on July 28, 1954. In 1977, he graduated as an engineer-constructor from Navapolatsk Polytechnic Institute.

It is mentioned in some sources that he began to work on his return from the army service after his graduation from the university in 1979. However, the information is inaccurate.

Actually, Sinitsyn started to work before his university studies. In 1971, he was employed as a packer at Polatsk Furniture Factory.

His father Georgiy was a Russian military man. His mother Katsiaryna was Belarusian. She worked for many years at Polatsk Milk Factory. The author doesn't pay special attention to such nuances, as a rule. An exception has been made for this essay only. This information will help the reader understand the inner motives that led Leanid Sinitsyn in 1995, when he drew a sketch of the Belarusian national emblem to substitute the historical *Pahonia* coat-of-arms. The sketch was used as a basis for the accepted national emblem. By the way, Sinitsyn himself doubted that he had any talent for painting. However, he started to paint the emblem, since it wasn't complicated for him, first of all. Secondly, the act was dictated by political reasons. He disregarded the historical tradition and heraldry, trying to please the target voters. It was undoubtedly immoral, but the team thought it would be relevant for meeting the political goals.

Due to this example, it becomes easier to understand the reasons for regarding Sinitsyn as one of most "pro-Russian" politicians in Belarus. Also, it becomes clear, why he published the arguable Manifesto, in cooperation with Parfianovich, a famous sportsman, an MP, and an opposition activist. The paper caused a violent reaction on the part of Belarusian patriots.

The author is not going to describe in detail Sinitsyn's occupation during the period since 1979 till 1990. There's hardly any point in telling the story. It should be mentioned though that he knows a lot in the construction field.

Sinitsyn's real political career started in 1990. However, it was somehow associated with his main trade at the beginning. He was elected a deputy

of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation and held the position of Deputy Chairman of Standing Committee on Architecture, Construction, Production of Construction Materials, Housing and Communal Services. Apparently, the fact is known by researchers only.
Unlike the other politicians, who liked to show off in front of microphones, Sinitsyn always remained in the shadow. The author believes that the trait of his character helped him to become Lukashenka's team leader or a playing coach, as football players say. To be more precise, he started playing the captain's role, since for some reason it is very difficult to teach such a player as Lukashenka for a long period of time. He can hardly obey to any rules.
It is widely known that Sinitsyn led Lukashenka's pre-election headquarters in 1994. Actually, he ensured Lukashenka's victory at the first Presidential elections. He started from the beginning, since nothing could be found behind Lukashenka's back yet. He had neither a political party, no the so-called administrative resources.
Sinitsyn managed to gather more than 20 thousand people to Lukashenka's group of supporters during a rather short period of time.
The time differed from our today's realities a lot. However, something similar can be noticed nowadays.
In particular, it concerns the tiredness of the existing power. Only that the phases are different. The end was approaching in the 1990-ies, on the one hand, and it's the very beginning of the other phase, on the other hand.
By the way, the election structures were present all over the country. However, it wasn't their quantity that presented a special importance. The acquaintances meant a lot then. The author suggests that Sinitsyn tried to lean on that base, when he wanted to take part in the presidential elections in 2001, too. However, it was quite a different time with different rules of play against competitors. Lukashenka's milieu consisted of people with different ambitions and different characters then. All conflicts were *"stifled"* by Sinitsyn. He called it *"the negotiation skill"*. A political scientist Aliaksandr Fiaduta was among Lukashenka's subordinates at that time. He recollected Sinitsyn's efforts in his book "Lukashenka. The Political Biography", where he mentioned that Sinitsyn hadn't exaggerated his *"ability of arranging the negotiating process"*. The election headquarters confirmed the unique ability,when Sinitsyn went to America for 2

weeks and Ivan Tsitsiankou was temporarily appointed instead of him. "If Sinitsyn had stayed in Houston for one week more, the whole election campaign would have gone into pieces, in spite of a special prestige of our candidate. Ivan Tsitsiankou was absolutely unacceptable in the capacity of the fully authorized manager of election headquarters. The author is not going to enumerate and analyze all Sinitsyn's deeds at one of the top governmental positions in the country. The majority of conclusions may become debatable. The author wouldn't like to debate with anybody in this essay. The task is different. The author intends to tell about a person and about the most striking activities.

Thus, e.g., the author was deeply impressed by the fact that Sinitsyn had left his position on his own wish, and that he was not ousted from his post with a scandal. Undoubtedly, his activity on the positions of the head of Presidential administration and the Deputy Premier arises a lot of questions. However, it is the most important thing that he left the position, though he could have easily remained in power.

He didn't leave the position quietly and voluntarily. It was done as a token of protest against the policy led by the country leader. He described the situation in the *Narodnaya Volya* newspaper on July 31, 1996:

"In my opinion, the principles and methods, which you have used since recently, running the state, are erroneous". To interprete the words in a clearer way, it means that Sinitsyn spoke against the dictatorship of that very person, whom he had proposed to the position of the President in 1991. It is a lesson to be learnt. One should think about the finish, when he/she just starts.

The author remembers it very well that after the first round of elections Sinitsyn made an appeal on Lukashenka's mission, in which he promised real freedom to the press. However, the country was shocked by *"blank spots"* in newspapers and by expelling the most influential opposition editions from the Press House in a year. It was a great surprise for Sinitsyn. Still, it has not yet become a sign for re-comprehension of the course led by the country leader on overstepping the established limits.

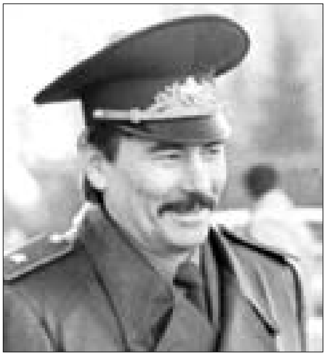
It should be especially emphasized that Sinitsyn was the second person to leave the Presidential team after Ganchar. He understood that he didn't understand Lukashenka's policies any longer.

Leanid Sinitsyn took a decision to run for Presidency himself in 2001. He spoke about that intention in October 2000. His program was so much "pro-Russian”, that nobody doubted about the Kremlin’s move. Sinitsyn did not hide it, either. It was probably the way of some political forces in Russia to give a signal to Lukashenka that if he failed to win the election, he would be replaced by some other candidates. Sinitsyn understood it, too. Therefore, more than 30,000 collected signatures were rejected on far-fetched reasons.

Sinitsyn understood it as well, and consequently, he decided to leave the field.

He left politics and moved to business as a vice-President of the "Social Technologies" Public Association. However, he returned to politics from time to time. Sometimes he did it in a rather sensational way. In particular, the Manifesto for the Union with Russia, published by Parfianovich and him in March 2007, caused sensational discussions.

The author is not going to retell its main points in order to avoid confusions. It should be noticed in this respect that the Manifesto caused immediate rejection not only among the BPF supporters, but also among other respected opposition members. The most ridiculous thing is that nobody understands where the logic is.



YURY ZAKHARANKA, GENERAL

Prepared for publication on 20.11.2007

Last time the author met with Zakharanka at Chygir's place, located between the Northern cemetery and Minsk Sea. It happened that suddenly the engine of Zakharanka's Mercedes failed to work, and the author had to tow his car to that very parking, from which the General did not come back home on May 7, 1999.

Yury Zakharanka was born in the town Vasilevichy, Rechytsa district, Homiel region on January 4, 1952. In 1977, he graduated from Volgograd School at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (USSR), and ten years after he graduated from the Academy.
He was drafted to the obligatory military service in 1970. Thus, the prospective police general became an ordinary sailor of the Baltic Fleet for some time.
The author won't list all the positions Zakharanka occupied in the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR and Belarus later on. However, it should be noted that unlike his ministerial successors, he knew all peculiarities of police work very well. Thus, in 1977, Zakharanka started to work as a legal investigator at Svetlagorsk District Department of Internal Affairs, and in 1989, he was appointed to the position of Deputy Head of Interior Department at Homiel Regional Executive Committee. In 1991, Zakharanka was appointed to the post of Deputy Head of Inter-regional Department for Combating Organized Crime at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR, and in a year, he headed the newly established Investigating Committee at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Belarus. He was dealing with the real criminals. And he believed that a man needed the head for something smarter than crashing bricks...

The Belarusian police flourished under Zakharanka's commandment. The Criminal Intelligence Service was organized and the whole structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was re-organized at that time. However, the most important thing was that a militiaman stopped being the obedient Cerberus of the system. In October 1995, Zakharanka was dismissed from his position. It was not by chance that the armed capture of the building, where the Ministry of Internal Affairs was located, was led by Y. Barodzich, the Head of Presidential Security Service. The incumbent rulers knew pretty well that the militiamen would not execute the order.

Yury Zakharanka participated in the last Congress of the CPSU. He wasn't an ardent Communist. It should be explained that all top functionaries were members of the Communist Party at that time, and it was considered to be very prestigious to attend such a gathering.

Lukashenka appointed Y. Zakharanka to the post of the Minister of Internal Affairs just after his victory at the first Presidential elections. A corresponding decree was issued on July 1, 1994. In a short while, he was elevated to the rank of Major General. Apparently, Zakharanka was the youngest Minister of Internal Affairs in the countries of the former Soviet Union. The Ministry of Internal Affairs officers were very glad at such an appointment. Zakharanka belonged to their milieu. He wasn't connected with the former Komsomol functionaries.

However, the author is convinced that it was exactly the reason of his falling into disfavor later on. The young Minister did not have the experience of nomenclature intrigues, and he started *"digging"* in such places, where he was not supposed to step in. Thus, e.g., he collected a lot of materials for trials against the *"country manager"* Ivan Tsitsiankou at that time. As it is known, the latter behaved indecently, disregarding the laws. It brought the traditionally supportive top governmental officials out of patience. Thus, one of Belarus Security Council employees said that a prison cell had been prepared for Tsitsenkov in the "Amerikanka" KGB prison in Minsk and that a corresponding order had been typed. Reportedly, the Security Council members were waiting for the order till late at night. However, they were given the all-clear. It happened, when Zakharanka was not leading the Ministry of Internal Affairs any longer…

The author is not going to dwell upon the eventual murder intentionally, though everybody understands everything very well. There are some people, who believe that one day Zakharanka will come back.

Tsitsiankou was always considered to be Lukashenka's *"money-bag"*. It is obvious that Zakharanka received plenty of "signals" from the top governmental officials in this respect. The author is sure that Zakharanka would have imprisoned Tsitsiankou. He had a lot of evidence. It is worth mentioning that it was Zakharanka, who arranged *"the leak"* of materials about the scandalously known *"Torgexpo"* company to the press. The author remembers what a fuss it was. The arrested wagons with the smuggled vodka, cigarettes, and furniture were standing at Kalodzishchy station near Minsk. It seems that Zakharanka did not get it clear at that moment that people come to power to have easier ways for stealing.

The author thinks that Zakharanka's adherence to moral principles scared Lukashenka a lot. On October 16, 1995, he dismissed the Minister by his decree. On March 16, 1996, he deprived Zakharanka of his rank. According to the Belarusian Constitution of that time, the country leader could take such a step only with the permission of the Supreme Soviet. The parliamentary session gathered the unusually large quantity of journalists. Zakharanka came out to the rostrum very quickly. He started his speech and at that moment the Speaker Siamion Sharetski stood up from his chair, came up closer to Lukashenka and started whispering to him about something, standing with his back to the speaker. Everybody understood that Zakharanka's official career was over. It was the most disgraceful page in Sharetski's political biography. Like many other colleagues, the author stopped showing respect to Sharetski since that time.

However, let's come back to Chygir's cottage. One should not be Cassandra to understand that Zakharanka was only carrying out somebody's order. And it's not difficult to guess whose order it was. And, probably, the point of the order was to *"dig out"* at least something. But Zakharanka did not do that. To be more precise, he executed the order, but it differed from the expected scenario.

A scrupulous check-up showed that there was nothing to *"dig out",* since everything in the building corresponded to the law. Zakharanka did not know and did not want to learn how to falsify pieces of evidence, unlike the other people would do it later.

The author met Zakharanka at Chygir's place quite often. It would have never happened if something had been wrong. Volga Zakharanka rang up Yulia Chygir from time to time. They usually spoke for a long time. And as it is known, women have stricter criteria of human relations.

Zakharanka was in Lukashenka's team in 1994. However, in 1999, he was already among the people, who were authorized to act for Chygir.
Zakharanka cannot be regarded as an experienced politician though. For example, he accused publicly the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany Klaus Kinkel of his coming to Minsk in order to "suffuse Belarus with blood". It is a twist of fate, but it was exactly Germany that ensured political asylum to the kidnapped Zakharanka's wife and children in 2000. No doubt, such statements should not be delivered in big politics at all that shows Zakharanka's poor knowledge of proper political actions. However, the author is convinced that it was the political standpoint that caused Zakharanka's disappearance.
On dismissal from the position of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Zakharanka began to organize the Belarusian Union of Officers. However, the whole process was rather inert. It became more intense, when Chygir declared his participation in the *"virtual"* Presidential elections on December 5, 1998. According to different sources, the Union of Officers had gathered about two thousand members by the time of Zakharanka's disappearance. It was not too much. Still, people are right saying that the quality is more important than the quantity.
Firstly, almost all Union members were ardent ideological opponents of the regime in power.
Secondly, the Union members represented the people, who knew what to do with the arms. And it is not by chance that governments in the whole world treat kindly the people, who once had shoulder-straps.
Thirdly, Zakharanka was respected at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. When Chygir had been arrested, the author saw himself how Zakharanka entered the Legal Investigating Committee without any problems. The structure was headed by one of Zakharanka's protégés at that time. The policemen on duty were afraid to stop their former chef. Actually, Zakharanka had his "protégés" everywhere at that time.
Therefore, the events of May 7, 1999 were well-thought and well-planned indeed. Apparently, they were caused by the instinct of self-preservation. The conclusion was confirmed by Christos Pourgourides, a deputy of the European Parliament, in his Memorandum, proclaimed on March 28, 2004.
It is widely known that the so-called *"squadrons of death"* were reported to act in Belarus in the middle of 1990-ies. The terrible parallel with Argentina political crimes was presented by a former legal investigator

Aleg Sluchak. Reportedly, the group under D. Pauliuchenka's commandment, who is well-known in the internal troops, committed about 30 assassinations at that time. Reportedly, they were "dealing" with the crime bosses at first. Zakharanka was said to be the first "political" target for the group. The author cannot assert anything himself, apart from referring to the facts, highlighted in the above-mentioned Memorandum by Christos Pourgourides.

SIAMION SHARETSKI, THE LAST SPEAKER OF THE SUPREME SOVIET



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For the first time, the author interviewed Siamion Sharetski in 1997. He was already the opposition member at that time. He invited me to his private apartment, located in Malinauka micro-disctrict in Minsk. He was very polite and hospitable. However, it was not the only thing that impressed the author. Surprisingly, Sharetski lived in an ordinary multi-room apartment in an absolutely ordinary building, located quite far away from the city center of Minsk.

The author still remembers the nice scent of meals, cooked by Sharetski's wife. It was cabbage soup. One could hardly believe that a former Speaker of the Supreme Soviet was in front of him.

Siamion Sharetski was born on September 23, 1936 in the village Laurashova, Navagrudak district, Hrodna region. These circumstances must have influenced the opinion of local political elite that always regarded him as a *"villager"*. Almost all Belarusian politicians were born in villages, but their mentality was changing in the course of time. Sharetski's mentality remained the same.

They say that during the *"virtual"* elections Sharetski and Ganchar were seen eating out. Ganchar started reading the menu and asked Sharetski to choose the meals for himself. "The shark fin soup", Sharetski answered with a noticeable village accent.

S. Sharetski graduated from the Belarusian Agricultural Academy and started to work at the *Zviazda* collective farm in 1959. He worked as Deputy Chairman at first and filled the Chairman's position in 1963.

In 1970, Sharetski graduated from the Higher Party School at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. On graduation,

he worked as a senior lecturer for six years there. In 1976, he headed the Chair of Economy and Arrangement of Agricultural Production.

In 1972, Sharetski defended a Ph.D. thesis. In 1984, he defended a thesis for a Doctor's degree.

According to *The Encyclopedia of Belarusian History*, S. Sharetski has been awarded a range of scientific titles. Thus, he became a professor in 1989. In 1996, he became an academician of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences of Belarus as well as a Corresponding Member of the Russian Agricultural Academy, an academician of the Ukrainian Academy of Agricultural Sciences and an academician of the International Academy of Information Processes and Technologies.

Sharetski returned to the agricultural sector in 1984. According to the Soviet tradition, he was appointed through formal elections to the post of the Chairman of *Red Banner* collective farm in Valozhyn district, Minsk region.

However, it was not an ordinary collective farm. It was a new large-scale agricultural group of enterprises, developed on the initiative of Kuban agricultural landowners. Siamion Sharetski acted as an innovator, and he believed sincerely that it was the proper way to help out the agricultural sector in Belarus.

Kebich employed Sharetski as his advisor seven years after. A new historical page in the life of Belarus was opening, and completely new pages appeared in Sharetski's biography.

Thus, Sharetski founded the Agrarian Party of Belarus in 1994. In a year, he was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus of the 13th convocation, and he became its Chairman in January 1996. The Agrarian Party members made the biggest faction in the parliament. The formation of factions in the Supreme Soviet can be definitely regarded as Sharetski's indubitable merit and his biggest political success. It was an important step towards transformation of the Supreme Soviet into a real parliament.

According to the official information, the Agrarian Party continues to work nowadays. However, Sharetski is not the party member any longer. He was expelled from the political organization, as soon as it became obvious that *"Akela missed his stroke"* in 1997.

By all means, Sharetski was not the proper person to hold the second top position in the country. It became perfectly clear, when the situation in the country became highly complicated and dramatic in 1996.

However, Sharetski's chairmanship didn't happen by chance. The author remembers very well the moment of election at the beginning of 1996. The MPs from the Communist, Agrarian, and pro-presidential factions could get the position. It was necessary to have an alliance, in order to win. Siargei Kaliakin, the leader of the Party of Communists of Belarus has recollected that they agreed with the agrarians that the candidature with the majority of votes in the first round of election would be the speaker. 60 MPs voted for Kaliakin and 61 MPs supported Sharetski. The Communists kept their word. It was a unique case in modern history of Belarus, when one deputy mandate determined the fate of the entire country.
One of top leaders of that time told the author that if Lukashenka had brought Sharetski closer to him, there wouldn't have been any conflicts at all. Still, the relations between these two politicians were far from being bright from the very beginning. Both of them participated in a secret personal meeting in 1994. Actually, Lukashenka didn't need it so much. Apparently, he didn't regard Sharetski as a worthwhile opponent. Force admits only force. They say Lukashenka was very glad that Sharetski had been elected to the position of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet instead of Kaliakin.
In January 1996, S. Sharetski became the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. No mystic at all, but for the moment the 13th Supreme Soviet is the last one. And Sharetski himself is the last Speaker.
That position was not the highest one in Sharetski's political career, since he became the Acting President on July 20, 1999. Everybody understood that it was a virtual position, same as the elections announced by Ganchar. Everybody understood, but some people accepted that. It was Sharetski's fault, first of all, that these people indulged in wishful thinking. It was Sharetski's fault that he had betrayed General Zakharanka and the *Narodnaya Gazeta* newspaper. It was the Supreme Soviet to decide on the Minister's fate. *The Narodnaya Gazeta* was published by the Supreme Council of Belarus. None of them survived.
Sharetski lost his influence at practically all levels in literally 8-9 months afterwards. It became clear, when all heads of Regional Executive Committees came to take part in the enlarged session of the Parliament in August 1996. It was not only for the reason that they

had been appointed by the President. In such a way they expressed their attitude towards Siamion Sharetski. Even A. Dubko, the Head of Hrodna Executive Committee was among them. It was that very "governor", who had been nominated as a candidate at the first Presidential elections by the Agrarian Party of Belarus. The power was lost de facto then. It was captured de jure in the autumn of 1996. The situation became especially dramatic, when the legally elected head of the Central Election Committee was illegally dismissed from his position by Lukashenka's order. Siamion Sharetski and Vasil Kapitan, General Prosecutor at that time, tried to help Ganchar to enter his office, captured by the Presidential security services, all in vain.

As soon as the term of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation service expired, it became obvious that Sharetski had nothing at all. He had neither the Party, nor a possibility to influence upon something in practice. His position was left to him, though. It was considered to be legitimate in the whole world. However, it was only a formal position that meant hardly anything, following his emigration to Vilnius. Once, the author was lucky to meet Sharetski there. Maybe, he really needed to have two bodyguards behind his back, but that looked rather theatrically. In 2001, Sharetski was granted political asylum in the United States. He moved to California together with his family.

The Belarusian state TV reported some time ago that Sharetski had almost become a homeless person in America. It is a pure fantasy, indeed. No doubt, his life quality is absolutely normal and corresponds to the American standards that exceed considerably the accepted norms in Belarus.

However, there is another thing that causes a feeling of regret. The people in Belarus start to forget Sharetski. He didn't manage to do the things that he was supposed to do. It is a rather sad result for a politician.



STANISLAU BAGDANKEVICH, A BANKER AND A POLITICIAN

Prepared for publication on 25.12.2007

The author would like to begin the essay with highlighting Bagdankevich's famous "stubbornness". On July 26, 1993, the Central Bank of Russia suspended operation of Soviet rubles and the money, which had been produced in 1992. In response, the National Bank of Belarus took a decision to introduce the so-called "zaichyki". It was done on Stanislau Bagdankevich's personal initiative. It contradicted to Shushkevich's and Kebich's intentions to play "the Russian card".

Shushkevich had a meeting with Yeltsin on August 19, 1993. Consequently, Kebich signed an agreement with Chernomyrdin on unification of monetary systems in two weeks. However, both were interfered with "the stubbornness", manifested by Professor Bagdankevich.

Stanislau Bagdankevich was born on January 1, 1937 in the village Shapavaly, Valozhyn district, Minsk region. It was under the Polish rule at that time. That is why, he sometimes jokes that he is a *"foreigner"* in a way. The place of birth was mentioned like that in Bagdankevich's official biography. However, according to him, it didn't correspond to the reality to some extent. The matter is that the village Shapaval (more correct) is not a traditional village. It is an ordinary khutor, located not far away from Radashkovichy railway station. The nearest secondary school was located in the village Dubrava in five km from Bagdankevich's native place. As soon as Bagdankevich graduated from the school, he entered the accelerated courses at Pinsk Economic-Credit Technical School. In 1.5 years, he began to work as the head of Credit Department at Maladziechna branch of *Sberbank of the*

USSR. He found work in Maladziechna, since his parents had moved to this provincial town. A couple of years later, he got a proposal to lead Kletsk District Bank. Later on, the Belarusian Republican Bank of the State Bank of the USSR became the place of his permanent work for a long period of time. (It is the National Bank of Belarus now.) The author won't list all the positions, occupied by Bagdankevich in different periods of time.

In 1964, Bagdankevich graduated from the All-Union Financial-Economic Institute by correspondence with honours. He specialized in the Finances and Credit Relations. It was the famous MFEI. Considering self-education to be among the best forms of getting education, Bagdankevich studied without wasting his time. He was fond of receiving information from the first sources himself.

In 1978, Bagdankevich defended a Ph.D. thesis. In 1991, he defended his Doctor's degree, though he had not written a thesis for his Doctor's degree. He was given a new academic degree on the basis of his publications.

In 1981, Stanislau Bagdankevich was appointed the Head of Monetary Turnover and Credits department at the Belarusian Institute of National Economy. He worked there for ten years, and in 1991 he took the post of the Chairman of the Board of the National Bank of Belarus. It is interesting to know how the appointment happened. When Belarus became sovereign, the country leaders of that time for some reason went to Moscow to look for the chief economist of Belarus there. The Russian leaders were surprised very much, since they wanted to employ Bagdankevich themselves. Thus, Bagdankevich was called to Mikalai Dziemiantsiei, where he was offered to be the head of the National Bank of Belarus. As Bagdankevich likes to joke, it was done by partocrats, not democrats. He is fond of joking.

Once, Stanislau Bagdankevich was digging holes at his dacha together with his third son Pavel, born on August 25, 1996. When the neighbours wondered as for the purpose of the wholes, Bahdankevich answered: "We want to reach the center of the earth."

In order to stop all possible rumours and gossips about Bagdankevich's children and wives, the author would like to touch upon that subject, too. Actually, Bagdankevich got married for the second time, since his first wife Tatsiana had died of a serious illness at the young age. Bagdankevich has two sons by her, Eduard and Anton. Eduard was

one of the owners of the sadly known *"Piask"* company. The company was ruined at first, and then it was "cleared out" that nothing criminal had been found in its activity.

After Tatsiana's death, Bagdankevich didn't get married for five years. He knew his second wife, Volga Shybko since the times of their studies at the institute. She was an assistant at the same chair where he used to work. When Pavel was born, Stanislau Bagdankevich was already 59 years old.

When Shushkevich decided to take part in the first Presidential elections in 1994, Stanislau Bagdankevich was shown by the Belarusian TV as a prospective Prime Minister in his team. It was a signal that the reforms, which had been leveled by Kebich's Government, would finally take place in the country.

Having come to power, Lukashenka did not appoint a new leader of the National Bank immediately. It wasn't caused by the necessity to address to the Supreme Soviet with a request to adopt a new candidature.

It was clear from the very beginning that Bagdankevich could not be ranked among the President's people. However, he seemed to be the only person who could constrain inflation effectively.

Stanislau Bagdankevich had been holding the position of the Chairman of the National Bank of Belarus till September 14, 1995, when his place was occupied by Tamara Vinnikava. The result of this change became visible to all Belarusian citizens in a year's term. Belarus occupied one of the leading places on the growth of inflation rate in the world. The dismissal of Bagdankevich looked like a bad detective story. Lukashenka's security service changed the guard in the National Bank of Belarus. The whole Minsk was *"buzzing"* that Bagdankevich had suddenly disappeared but he was in Chygir's office at that time.

Then Stanislau Bagdankevich became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus. The author believes that it was a quite unexpected decision for the official authorities. The former banker was blamed for everything; the company of his son was destroyed — all in vain. The explanation of this "miracle" is simple as ABC. At that time, there were not only talks about the "elegant victories", but the people's votes were also counted.

Bagdankevich was one of the candidates to the position of the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet but he did not have too much

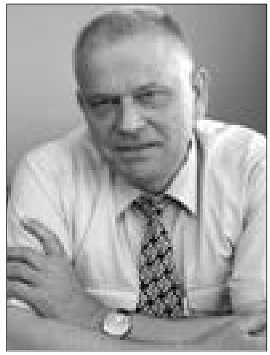
aspiration for power. It became obvious in 2000 when he let the young Anatol Liabedzka to take his position of the real leader of the United Civic Party of Belarus.

Bagdankevich headed the *Civic Action* faction in the Parliament. In February 1998, he became a deputy of the National Executive Committee, formed by the opposition.

In 2002, Bagdankevich was called to the National Bank again to discuss the issue of introducing the united currency with Russia. Once again Bagdankevich expressed his personal opinion that coincided with the expectations of incumbent rulers at that moment. It was his principle position he adhered to during all his life.

And it is not by chance that Lukashenka called him a *"reasonable person from opposition"* at that time. And it is not a mere accident that Bagdankevich's name is included into the encyclopedia, which will be published soon. At present, it is the only opposition activist's name there.

VASIL LIAVONAU, MINISTER IN DISGRACE



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The author must admit that on learning about Vasil Liavonau's visit to the United Arab Emirates after his release from jail, he though that the former minister in disgrace would never come back to Belarus. Liavonau's younger daughter Zoya resides with her husband in the United Arab Emirates. Therefore, he had moral rights and sound reasons to remain there. Luckily, the author was mistaken.

Vasil Liavonau was born in the village Dubeyats, Kastsukovichi district, Mahilou region, on April 16, 1938.
The village was included into the Chernobyl de-settlement area after the nuclear disaster in 1986. Few people remained there. Therefore, Vasil Liavonau doesn't have his small motherland anymore. His father was killed during the World War II. That's why, a future secretary of the regional Communist Party Committee and a future minister of agriculture and food industry was brought up by his mother... and the street. "The elder boys forced us to smoke. Otherwise they struck us in the face. After the first or the second cigarette it was impossible to breathe, and after the third one we got used to it", Liavonau recollected the challenging time of his childhood.
Having graduated from school, he went to take entrance exams at Horki Agricultural Academy. However, "soldiers and industrial workers" were granted entrance privileges that year. Liavonau did not have any chances. Answering without mistakes, he received only a "good" mark at the first exam in Chemistry, all of a sudden. Consequently, he took the documents and submitted them to the Higher Military School. However, he made up his mind to come back home on spending a month in the barracks.

Liavonau started to work at the *"Kranshtadt"* collective farm. He repaired his house in the meanwhile, put everything in order and went to the town of Shakhty to get a better-paid job. He was employed at the never-to-be-forgotten coal mine Krasnogvardeiskaya 12-13 BIS there.

Liavonau came back to Belarus in a year and entered the Belarusian Institute of Mechanization of Agriculture. He was a wealthy student. He even bought a cow for his mother. When he invited his future wife Antanina to the theatre, he bought tickets to the stalls only.

On March 12, 1963, Vasil and Antanina got married. It is worth mentioning the family changed 24 places of residence, living together.

Antanina gave birth to their three daughters — Tatsiana, Sviatlana, and Zoya. These women helped Liavonau to overcome all hardships of his destiny. The French writer Luis Aragon must have said the following about such daughters: "A woman is the future of a man".

In 1964, Liavonau graduated from the Institute. Afterwards, he took the position of an inspector-organizer on mechanization at Krasnapolle Production and Administration Department.

Some months later, he was appointed to the position of a mechanical engineer at *Klimavichski* sovkhoz, and three years later, he became the director of *Milaslauski* state farm. In 1972, Liavonau was appointed to the position of the First Deputy Head of Mahilou Regional Department of Agriculture. In 1975, he took the post of the Chairman of Horki District Executive Committee.

Liavonau's party career began in 1975. At first, he took the post of the First Secretary of the Communist Party Committee for Horki District. Then, he took the post of the First Secretary of the Communist Party Committee for Mahilou Region in 1982. According to the Soviet standards, he was *"God Almighty"* of one sixth of the territory of Belarus.

The *"winds of change"* came to Belarus in 1989. One had to fight seriously to become an MP of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR at that time. A sovkhoz director Lukashenka and the Prime Minister Kebich competed for a parliamentary mandate at the same constituency. Due to Liavonau's support, Kebich managed to win the election then. In a year, Vasil Liavonau was elected to the Supreme Soviet of Belarus of the 12th convocation. Lukashenka called him his teacher at the Supreme Soviet some time later.

Liavonau met the putsch of 1991 in Germany, where he had been working as a trade representative of Belarus for almost three years. He came to Germany, being a person who started to doubt of the advantages of Soviet methods of management, and he came back to Belarus as an ardent supporter of market reforms. He tried with all his might to implement the reforms. He was especially insistent in reforming the branch of agriculture.

He tried to do it according to the programmes and plans, developed under his guidance. Actually, he was among the few representatives of nomenclature, who treated seriously the necessity of economic reforms. Unfortunately, he didn't have many supporters at that time. Therefore, his efforts were stopped then. However, he managed to revive them some time later.

Thus, the price of practically all food products became economically grounded on Liavonau's initiative in November 1994. (Mikhail Chygir was the Prime Minister of Belarus at that time.) Lukashenka was furious. He returned from Sochi all of a sudden on November 11, 1994. Still, he did not disturb Liavonau at that time.

He must have understood his role in saving the Belarusian economy. Vasil Liavonau was arrested on November 11, 1997. A lot of people saw on TV, how the Minister had been arrested and hand-cuffed in his office. It was a great shock for the public.

At first, Liavonau was accused of preparing a murder of Yauhen Mikalutski, who used to work as a state inspector in Mahilou. The prosecutors pretended he had assisted a *Double Hero* of Socialist Labour Vasil Staravoitau to prepare the crime. However, Liavonau was imprisoned for another reason. He was charged with misappropriation of an expensive set of furniture. Only one witness — Vasil Staravoitau — out of 220 people was not called to the court. He was the most important witness though, since the set of furniture had been produced at Staravoitau's enterprise.

The sadly known Stalin's prosecutor Andrej Vyshynski considered "self-accusation" to be the queen of all proofs. In Liavonau's case, the investigators and the judge restricted themselves to the examination of Staravoitau's records only. He was not even brought to the court. Maybe, somebody was afraid he would say something undesirable there. The author remembers that the Prosecutor requested 8 years of imprisonment for Liavonau, but the judge sentenced the disgraced

minister to 4 years of jail. The hearing of the case lasted for more than five months and the "murder" accusations turned to the inflicted USD 115 damage to the country in the meanwhile. The sentence was passed on January 14, 2000. However, Liavonau was released on amnesty in nine months since then. It was done as soon as he received a telegram about the death of his brother Ivan.

The relations between Liavonau and Staravoitau should be highlighted in detail. Actually, Liavonau "betrayed" the Minister. It would have been absolutely logical if Liavonau had changed his attitude towards the *Double Hero* of Socialist Labour. However, it didn’t happen. On the opposite, Vasil Liavonau emphasized repeatedly that he continued to treat Staravoitau with great respect. No doubt, it was said sincerely. Liavonau forgave Staravoitau, being aware of the way of his interrogations very well.

The author would like to stress that the forgiveness is not a sign of Liavonau’s feebleness. He can be rather tough, when necessary. Thus, the author saw him once giving a good scolding to a journalist Anatoly Gulyaeu. It looked ugly, when he treated the highly experienced reporter as a teenager boy. In a way, it was a mark of his Soviet management style. Undoubtedly, it couldn’t be practised by the person, who wished to implement democratic changes in the country. It is only possible to reach the changes in case of clear division of relations, duties, and responsibilities.

The author remembers another quite unpleasant event that happened during the 2001 Presidential Elections in Belarus. Valiantsina Palevikova was responsible for Uladzimir Gancharyk’s elections headquarters then. As soon as Gancharyk became a single Presidential candidate from the opposition, he proposed Vasil Liavonau to lead the headquarters. Palevikova knew about that. Thus, there happened a situation of double management that hampered the alternative candidate’s success at the elections.

The author remembers very well that it was Liavonau who provided Gancharyk with absolutely unique information about the disappeared politicians, but the latter failed to use it in a proper way.

Liavonau’s participation in the election was a highly bright period in his oppositional political activity. His influence on the campaign strategy and tactics was quite important indeed. Some people hailed Liavonau’s activity. Others considered it to be counterproductive. This

way or another, Liavonau appeared to be the first representative of "old" nomenclature, who tried to start a dialogue between the nomenclature and the opposition. It was a necessary precondition of democratic reforms. Unfortunately, the sides were not ready for such a dialogue then. The nomenclature side was faulty, first of all. Unfortunately, the situation remains the same nowadays.

Liavonau founded and led *For New Belarus* regional fund in 2002. It was registered in Russia, since the Ministry of Justice had refused to register the organization in Belarus.

Reportedly, the fund is not engaged in the Belarusian problematic any longer. Although retired, Liavonau continues to consult Russian businessmen, being a high-profile expert in the field of agriculture.

MIKHAIL MARYNICH, AMBASSADOR



Prepared for publication on 13.01.2008

The real competitors are sent by authoritarian rulers far away from the political scene. Marynich paid dearly for his challenge and counteraction to the regime in power.

Mikhail Marynich was born on January 13, 1940 in the village Staryia Halouchytsy, Petrykau district, Homiel region. His thirst for knowledge at school predetermined in many ways his future life. He moved along the career steps as a professional, but not as a Komsomol-and-Party functionary.

The people like Marynich are humorously named *"the martyrs of science".* Thus, he graduated from the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute, the Institute of Foreign Languages, and Minsk Higher Communist Party School. The year of 1996 was marked in his life not only by the sadly known referendum, but also by the defense of his Ph.D. thesis on the problems of economy. It was nothing but a logic final of his scholar activities.

The defense of his thesis didn't mean anything for his career. The career had already been predetermined due to his outstanding personality, on the one hand, and the social and political changes in the country, on the other hand. One epoch was over and the other one started.

In the first epoch, Marynich dedicated 16 years of his life to construction work. He worked as a supervisor, an engineer, a foreman at the *"Tsentrtranstekhmantazh"* industrial enterprise, a chief engineer, and the head of *"Belbudmantazh"*. Also, for about three years, he worked at a construction site in Afghanistan.

Marynich started to work at the Soviet governmental structures since 1979. He was a deputy at the beginning. Later on he was appointed

to the position of the Chairman of Maskouski City District Executive Committee in Minsk. In 1984, he was appointed to the post of the Deputy Chairman of Minsk Executive Committee. Among other, he controlled the construction of Minsk underground as well as the objects of heat supply and power engineering.

He accepted the perestroika. He rocketed on its streams, being appointed to the position of the Mayor of Minsk. It used to be a formal executive position in the Soviet framework, but it turned to an important political post in the new system of power.

The same streams dismissed him from the position in 1991. The deputies of Minsk City Council did not elect Marynich to the post then. He represented the Communist party nomenclature. The affiliation was abhorred at that time. The author is sure that some of the deputies felt ashamed for this decision in 13 years, when Marynich appeared behind bars for far-fetched reasons.

Marynich was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. He was a member of the Planning and Budgetary Standing Committee as well as the Standing Committee on Architecture, Construction, Production of Construction Materials, and Housing Services.

He had a reputation of a benevolent supporter of democratic changes. He was equally respected by the nomenclature and opposition representatives in the Parliament.

Marynich became a member of the famous "Anti-corruption" Standing Committee some time later. Quite a few people wanted him to lead the Committee, but he refused in favour of Aliaksandr Lukashenka.

Virtually, he yielded the first step of his political career to the future president. The latter was thankful for that for a rather long period of time.

Marynich didn't get the ministerial position at once though. A new stage of his political career started in 1994, when he was appointed the Ambassador of Belarus to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. His ended his official political career at a similar position of the Ambassador of Belarus to Latvia seven years later. The circle was locked, but the course of his life was going on through achievements and frustrations, hopes and disappointments, flights and falls, sufferings and joys.

Marynich worked in Prague for less than a year. On October 7, 1994, he was appointed the Minister of Foreign Economic Relations by the President's decree No. 92. Marynich was the only minister of Foreign Economic Relations of Belarus. The newly founded ministry was handed over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in five years. Some people are still criticizing the decision, but the author is not going to analyze its pros and cons in this essay.

If some governmental structure is dissolved, its former leaders of pension age are usually retired. It didn't happen in Marynich's case, though he was close to the pension age. On January 20, 1999, he was appointed the Ambassador of Belarus to Latvia, Estonia, and Finland. The Ambassador Marynich took the absolutely unexpected decision to run for the Presidential election in 2001.

It was pretty clear that somebody was standing behind Marynich. Miasnikovich was mentioned more frequently than others in this respect. (They were on friendly terms at that time.) The incumbent regime was on the alert. Marynich was prevented from collecting the necessary quantity of signatures in support of his candidature. Consequently, he did not manage to become a presidential candidate.

It should be reminded that the former Deputy Head of Presidential Administration Ivan Pashkievich, who immigrated to the United States later on, and a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th and 13th convocations Leanid Sechka worked at Marynich's election headquarters. The list of other famous supporters included Mr Alpeyeu, Rector of International Humanitarian Institute. The names of supporters were kept in secret, since they were acting leaders at that time. However, the author is convinced that the incumbent regime representatives knew all of them very well. Marynich hardly posed any threat to the regime in power, but his supporters were rather dangerous. It might have been the reason for Miasnikovich's dismissal from the position of the Head of Presidential Administration immediately after the Presidential election. It might have been a mere coincidence indeed.

It might have been a mere coincidence that Mikhail Marynich was arrested and sent to jail after the Presidential election, too. He was already retired at that time. However, he was managing the Belarusian *"Business Initiative"* International Public Association. Several days before his arrest, Marynich had a meeting with Aliaksandr Kazulin,

who had been dismissed from his position and preliminary accused of stealing the gold from the companies of the Belarusian State University. (The version was dropped by legal investigators later on.) Nobody knows, what both of them were discussing, but a lot people said at that time that Marynich's desire to participate in the Presidential elections had been supported by definite circles in Moscow.

Marynich was driving from Moscow to Minsk, when his car was stopped by a police patrol. The police officers found USD 90,000 in his bag. The politician explained the episode in his interview to Radio Liberty not long ago: "These were my private means and the money of my family. I intended to take the sum of USD 90,000 home. The regime in power was acting, according to the planned scenario. My apartment had been robbed not long before that. That's why my family appeared without money, we needed to have money to live on... I was not ready that the police and the KGB would stop me in such an impudent way, that they would search me without any grounds and, besides, that they would take all the money. If a person does nothing against the law, he won't be prepared for such a meeting with the police".

It was *"cleared out"* on the following morning that a part of the seized notes was *"false"*. It was announced as a reason for keeping Marynich in custody. His dacha was searched and an unknown pistol without the master's finger-prints was found there. Some cartridges and several copies of documents from Marynich's ministerial times were found there, too. It happened in March 2004. In December 2004, Marynich was sentenced to 5 years of imprisonment in a strict regime colomy with confiscation of his property. The term was reduced to three years of imprisonment later on. The public prosecution didn't manage to pin the weapon, the "false" dollars that strangely disappeared together with the real dollars afterwards and the stolen documents on him. Mikhail Marynich was ridiculously found guilty of "stealing" a computer that belonged to his *Business Initiative* organization. The organization had problems with the office premises. Therefore, the computers were temporarily stored in his son's garage. However, the obvious reason didn't change the judge's mind. Marynich was found guilty. The Embassy of the United States of America that owned these computers had not filed any claims to the Belarusian judicial authorities. Moreover, the Embassy representatives even asked the Belarusian authorities to close the case and release Marynich from custory. It did not help either.

A small courtroom of Minsk Regional Court was overcrowded during all three days of the trial with democratic activists, journalists, representatives of diplomatic missions, human rights defenders and other non-indifferent people. Marynich's sons Igar and Pavel, their mother Ludmila and Marynich's first wife as well as his second common-law wife Tatsiana Baranava were present in the courtroom all the time.

Mikhail and Tatsiana registered their marriage in Vorsha colony # 8 on March 12, 2006. Tatsiana Baranava was 33 at that time. She gave birth to their son in February 2007. One more Mikhail Marynich came to earth.

Marynich had a stroke, when he was in prison, but the Belarusian Femida was not impressed by the fact. Still, he was released ahead of schedule in March 2006, on spending two years in jail. (A person can be released early from jail only in case of spending 2/3 of punishment term without disciplinary sanctions.)

Marynich was taken to prison as a healthy man, and he was released with disabilities. However, you will never notice the disability, looking at him. Mikhail Marynich has overcome the illness and its consequences. He is just the same as he used to be before. He is intelligent, polite, energetic, and business-like. "I am proud that you are a contemporary of mine", Viktar Ganchar said once about this kind of people.

ULADZIMIR GANCHARYK, A SINGLE CANDIDATE



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The author does not agree with those, who say that only Gancharyk was guilty of the defeat in 2001 and that the fate of struggle against dictatorship was solved by the party nomenclature that abstained from democratic changes for self-preservation. First of all, it was not only the nomenclature that refrained from the changes. Secondly, taking into account the Belarusian realities, the regime opponents" victory can hardly be gained without getting confident, secret or open, support from the nomenclature representatives. In 2006, the opposition carried out the election campaign on its own. The results are well known. The author is convinced that it is only possible to achieve success, working together.

Traditionally, the author is going to begin the biographic essay about Uladzimir Gancharyk from his birth date. It is a very interesting issue in this concrete case. It is known that he was born in the village Augustova, located in approx. 5 km from Lagoisk, Minsk region, at the end of April 1940. What about the date? The documents were registered after the war, and Uladzimir's parents did not remember the exact date of birth of their son. Different variants were considered, even the 1st of May, but in the end the parents registered the date of April 29th. Still Gancharyk says that he does not know up till now, when his first cry was heard.

The author would like to pay your attention to one episode from Gancharyk's recollections of childhood, since it is so outstanding that it was retained in his memory for all his life, and, maybe, it even influenced on his fate. Anyway, Gancharyk told the author about it with special emotions.

The ordinary needles were in shortage during the war. At that time, the Gancharyks lived in a dugout. Uladzimir's mother managed to get a needle somewhere, and the small boy wanted to thread it. The needle slipped out of the child's fingers. And he did not find it. Uladzimir got it hot and strong.

The primary school was in his native village, but the secondary school was located in Lagoisk. It's hard to imagine nowadays, but in order to get a secondary school certificate Gancharyk had to walk 10 kilometers both ways every day. He graduated from school with a *"silver"* medal that meant having all *excellent* marks and one good mark in his high school diploma. The *good* mark was received for writing a composition, dedicated to the Communist Party in a way. "What on earth made me write the word "communist" with a capital letter?" Gancharyk exclaimed, recollecting the story. Maybe, it happened due to his high respect to communists, but it was definitely a mistake.

On graduation from school, Gancharyk entered the Department of Economy and Agriculture at the Institute of National Economy in Minsk. He got married during the first year of studies. Due to taking the party career, he changed nine places of residence together with his wife Lilia.

In 1961, he graduated from the Institute with honors and began to work as an economist. Some time later, he was appointed the Deputy Chief Accountant of the "10 Years of the BSSR" sovkhoz, located in Luban district, Minsk region.

In 1965, he was proposed to take an internship at the Komsomol organization. The Komsomol-Party career was quick and successful: the First Secretary of Luban District Committee of Komsomol, an instructor of Minsk District Committee of the Communist Party, the Second Secretary of Dziarzhynsk District Committee of the Communist Party, the First Secretary of Cherven District Committee of the Communist Party, the Deputy Head of Department at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, and the Second Secretary of Mahilou Regional Committee of the Communist Party. As they say, it was a typical party career for that time.

The author would like to dwell upon two moments in this respect.

In 1975, Uladzimir Gancharyk entered the Post-graduate studies of the Academy of Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the CPSU. In a year, he defended his Ph.D. thesis there. Among other,

he was offered the operational work. He wondered if it might have had connection to the KGB. However, as it turned out the proposal was concerning the position of the First Secretary of Cherven District Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus that he had occupied for more than 6 years.

When Gancharyk was appointed the Second Secretary of Mahilou Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, Vasil Liavonau held the position of the First Secretary there. They got on friendly terms in Mahilou. They lived in the same block of flats, walked together in the evenings every now and then, and discussed different things together.

Gancharyk was a deputy of the last Supreme Soviet of the BSSR. The deputies were elected from all districts, representing the unopposed "Party and People alliance”. The candidates to deputies were approved at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. The Second Secretary of the Regional Party Committee had to be on the list. Following the nomenclature trend, though it was more complicated, he became a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Against the background, he had to struggle for a deputy mandate in the Supreme Soviet of Belarus of the 13th convocation. However, being a deputy, Gancharyk never pretended to hold the leading roles.

In 1986, Uladzimir Gancharyk became the Chairman of the National Council of Trade unions. Later on, he became the Chairman of the Belarusian Federation of Trade Unions. The trade union work during the Soviet times was always associated with a kind of political exile. Therefore, as soon as Sliunkou proposed Gancharyk to lead the trade unions, the latter perceived the offer without any particular pleasure. He didn’t think of any exile at the age of 44! Some Communist Party leaders understood very well that some reforms were necessary. They aimed at holding the reforms and even tried to start them, but it did not help the CPSU. Gancharyk made unsuccessful attempts of reforming the system, too. However, it is impossible to reform the dying body. It is only possible to continue its death agony. Still, some activists, who initiated formation of independent trade unions, believe that Gancharyk had to act in a more confident way, in order to speed up the death of the Soviet model of trade unions and organize a really independent association of trade unions on its ashes, even at the cost of losing 2/3 of formal members of the former Federation. They think tha the remaining one third of members would be a real, strong, and

influential force that could act as a real defender of workers" interests. These people state that the whole course of events would have been absolutely different in this case.

A new regime was formed after the 1994 presidential elections in Belarus. It did not welcome new tendencies in the trade union movement. On the contrary, it tried not only to retain the former stereotypes, but also to take everything that was happening under its control. The rallies and mass meetings with over 100,000 people in 1991 were still fresh in the rulers" minds. (The protesting workers took active part in them at that time.) Therefore, all changes in the corresponding direction were firmly suppressed by the regime in power.

A strike of metro workers took place in 1995. All attempts to find at least some truth were blocked at that time. The leaders lost their working places. The incumbent rulers needed obedient unions of workers and peasants. Therefore, when during the first *"All-Belarusian Congress"* Gancharyk was the only one in the presidium, who voted against the *"nation-wide"* support, he was not forgiven.

Gancharyk refused to participate in the *"virtual"* presidential elections, arranged by Ganchar in 1999. However, he became a single opposition candidate at the real Presidential elections in 2001. And of course, two surnames, consonant with each other, Gancharyk and Ganchar, deceived a lot of people. People did not understand how it was possible to be kidnapped and to run for the presidential election at the same time. It was a primitive mistake. However, for some reason there were spread constant rumours on that score. It seemed as if somebody disseminated them on purpose.

The author is not going to discuss the 2001 Presidential election in detail. However, it should be noted that the statements about Gancharyk as a possible Belarusian Koshtunitsa, delivered on August 7, 2001, when finally all the parties agreed to a single candidate, caused ironical smiles. The people, who planned to become the single opposition candidate, smiled most of all. It is worth reminding thar Siamion Domash, Siargei Kaliakin, Pavel Kazlouski, and Mikhail Chygir pretended to that role. The negotiations between these politicians had been very complicated and overwhelmed with specific small matters. It’s no surprise that quite a few people didn’t regard any candidate seriously. In particular, certain political circles from Russia decided to count on the acting President of Belarus in the final run.

There were five prospective single candidates, apart from Gancharyk, at that time. However, all of them understood that they had to agree on one of them to continue the common struggle. The decision was supposed to be taken on July 17th, but the candidates hadn't managed to take a decision before that date. Gancharyk became the single candidate much later. However, he was a formal single candidate, since in reality Domash's supporters did not want to work for Gancharyk. All five columns should have united into one, and the so-called "fifth column" should not have appeared instead. Therefore, the author completely supports Aliaksandr Kazulin's move towards independence of candidates at the following Presidential election. The experience of 2001 Presidential election shows that it is impossible to unite the people, who do not want to be united.

A lot can be said about Gancharyk's headquarters and peculiarities of their functioning, but the author would like to focus the readers" attention on one example only. *The Day* newspaper, led by the author at that time, was preparing a special publication about the single candidate. *The Belarusian Press House* refused quite expectedly to fulfil the order. Therefore, the author agreed on the order with *"The Magic"* printing house instead. Though the printing-house was under tough control at that time, it became possible to come to terms.

However, it appeared that the editorial lacked the single candidate's photo at that time. The Editor managed to get one in a day only. Everything was published. The representatives of election headquarters promised to take the newspaper printrun from the printing-house themselves, and the author almost forgot about it. Therefore, it was a great surprise to receive a phone call from *The Magic* in three days before the election with a kind request to take the newspaper copies urgently from the printing house. They said that they were short of storage space, due to new orders, and that they had to take the newspaper copies outdoors, despite the approaching rain... The author would like to stress that it happened in only three days before the Presidential election.

After the 2001 Presidential election, Gancharyk left the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus and moved to Moscow, where he worked for some time at the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions. Then he dealt with providing assistance to businessmen. Gancharyk is a pensioner now. However, he is still involved in political improvisations from time to time.

SIAMION DOMASH, LOST OPPORTUNITIES



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Siamion Domash took the position of Director General of Grodno Tanning Amalgamation national unitary enterprise in 2006.Quite a few people perceived the decision in a rather negative way. They accused Domash of betraying their expectations. "A man should support himself", noted the other participant of events in 2001 Uladzimir Gancharyk at that. The author fully supports this point of view.

Siamion Domash was born in the village Tumashy, Liakhavichy district, Brest region, on January 2, 1950. He was only 56 at the moment of taking the arguable position. It is not the pension age, that's why when somebody starts talking about the *"betrayal of democratic principles",* the author always reminds of this fact and proposes the interlocutor to try walking in Domash's shoes. The author hasn't seen anybody, who continued to insist on political stereotypes in response.

Domash graduated from Babruysk Motor and Tractor Technical Secondary School and started to work at Astraviets Motor Depot No. 4 in 1969. He worked as a mechanic for a year. Later on he worked as an engineer for almost 4 years and as a director for 3 years. He moved to Hrodna as the director of the fleet of transport vehicles No.1 in 1977. Then, he worked as the Head of Industrical and Transport Department at Hrodna City Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus and held the position of the Second Secretary of the Kastrychnitski City District Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus in Hrodna.

In addition to the technical school, Domash also graduated from the Higher Party School in 1981 and the Belarusian Institute of National Economy in 1989.

According to the local tradition, the Party page in his career turned to the "Soviet" page and vice versa. Thus, Siamion Domash was elected (or rather appointed) the Chairman of Lida City Executive Committee in 1987. He was "drinking" the famous beer for 3 years, and then he came back to Grodno, where he led the City Executive Committee and the City Soviet of Deputies since June 1990 till October 1993. These were the years of cardinal social and political changes. The change of epochs required changes in people, too. These could be either profound changes or time-serving. The majority of party nomenclature acted with circumspection and tended to choose the second option. Domash chose the first one. He could not stand it till the end, since the time changed back again. That was the essence of his internal drama. He was not the only one in such a dramatic situation. The drama affected his health. He lived through a heart attack, following his defeat at the Presidential election and the consequent dilemma of joining the opposition or staying in the background of public life.

On October 21, 1993, he took the position of the Chairman of Hrodna Regional Executive Committee instead of the perished Zmitser Artsimenia. He became automatically the head of Hrodna Regional Soviet of Deputies, since these positions were not divided at that time yet. The future Hero of Belarus Aliaksandr Dubko was appointed to hold Domash's position of the Head of Hrodna Regional Executive Committee by the President's decree No.257 of December 12, 1994. Aliaksandr Dubko was a remarkable person, who passed away absolutely unexpectedly.

S. Domash led Hrodna Regional Soviet of Deputies for two more years. He supported sincerely the broadening of powers of local administration, the strengthening of its role in the territorial development and functioning of branches of national economy. Therefore, he became quite quickly one of the most famous regional leaders in Hrodna area. It was Domash, who had initiated foundation of the Association of European twin-cities and of the Nioman Euroregion. He was among the first local governers, who started to speak Belarusian. The step was enough for the whole local governmental machinery to do the same without any compulsions.

S. Domash was a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the 12th and 13th convocations. The Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation became the most distinctive page of his political biography. In May 1996,

he was elected a member of the Supreme Soviet Presidium, where he was responsible for the functioning of the Standing Committee on the State Construction and Local Government and dealt with strengthening relations between the institutions of local governance and the Belarusian Diaspora.

Domash spoke openly against Lukashenka's policy at the Constitutional referendum in November 1996. He was among 70 MPs, who had initiated the Impeachment and sent a corresponding letter to the Constitutional Court of Belarus. Domash became a single regional leader, who publicly joined the opposition to the President.

Siamion Domash came back to Hrodna after the defeat of those MPs, who objected to broadening and strengthening the Presidential powers in Belarus.

Domash led the *"Hrodna Initiative"* Coordinating Committee of Democratic Forces for Hrodna region since 1997 till 2002. The Committee united 34 public, political and trade union organizations of Hrodna region. On Domash's initiative, the *Regional Belarus* Coordinating Council was formed in May 2000.

The Presidential election was held in 2001. The regional NGO leaders, who acted as coordinators of the so-called resource centers, came forward with an initiative to nominate their Presidential candidate. Firstly, Viktar Karnienka and Aliaksandr Milinkevich claimed to this role. At the same time, the Federation of Trade Unions elected its candidate, Uladzimir Gancharyk. The political parties proposed their candidates, too. Finally a group of five prospective presidential candidates was formed. A single candidate was supposed to be elected after a long succession of meetings, open disputes and games behind the scenes, taking into account the number of collected votes.

Aliaksandr Milinkevich became responsible for Domash's electoral headquarters. On June 18, 2001, the Central Electoral Committee of Belarus registered Domash's initiative group in the amount of 3,695 members. The group was led by a young and ambitious lawyer Yaugen Labanovich, a member of the United Civil Party of Belarus. He had already worked for Viktar Ganchar at the so-called *"virtual"* elections in 1999.

On August 14, 2001, the Central Electoral Committee declared 160,077 signatures valid in support of Domash. However, on August 22 in the morning he gathered a press-conference, where in

journalists" presence he signed an application to the Central Electoral Committee of Belarus with a request to release him from participation in the presidential race, subject to the reached agreement to support a single candidate Uladzimir Gancharyk.

The author was lucky to be present at that press-conference. There wasn't any special joy in Domash supporters" eyes. It appeared that he went to the press conference after a meeting with the members of his electoral headquarters, who had instructed him to abstain from taking the final decision on his own. He was asked to return to the headquarters for advice at the worst. The quantity of supporters, who wanted to support Domash till the end of the election campaign and struggle for his victory, overcame considerably the number of people, who believed that he should have made concessions.

Quite a few people from Domash's team as well as the political analysts stated that it was necessary to go till the end. There were many aspect that worked for Domash, including the dynamics of his rating, the energetic team, the optimum combination of image of a reformer from nomenclature, a manager and a regional politician, who knew the problems of common people from the regions and the Belarusian capital.

It is obvious now that the government would not let him win. But he had rather big chances to become the national leader that meant to be the unquestionable single candidate at the coming elections. Anyway, a lot of people believed that Domash's participation or participation of two democratic candidates, especially if they had acted in cooperation, would have given dynamics and acuteness to the election campaign. They confirmed their opinion, referring to A.Kazulin's example later on.

In any case, it's understandable why those, who backed up Domash, did not work really together for Gancharyk. But even after that cardinal move, according to the sociological researches of Novak laboratory, the special rating of the former Grodno governor continued to increase. And it was not accidentally, since a new person showed up in the opposition.

The author also remembers very well the perfect relations between Siamion Domash and Vasil Bykau. It's worth mentioning that Domash even visited the famous writer in Finland. Also, Domash was on friendly relations with Karpenka and Kudzinau.

When the author was writing the essay, he decided to call Uladzimir Kudzinau, who ran a business in the Crimea. Kudzinau invited the author to one of his sanatorias that used to be quite famous in the former USSR. He was the Deputy Head of Domash's election headquarters in 2001. Kudzinau told the author that he used tokeep up good relations with Domash, but after the Presidential election they neither spoke nor seen each other. No comments, as they say.

Some people believe that Domash's non-participation in the presidential race became one of the reasons of his heart attack. We will never confirm it for sure, but the fact that S. Domash lost an opportunity in 2001 to become Lukashenka's rather serious political opponent is obvious. Unfortunately, he lost the opportunity. All of us lost it, too.

The author is convinced that the dangeroud illness was not the main reason for Domash to leave big politics after the 2001 presidential election. And he didn't go away at once. He even tried to organize a public movement, based on consolidating the existing ones. But he stopped his attempts to discuss the idea with the regional leaders after the meeting that used to be almost the last one in his political career, which he had organized in one of cafes in Hrodna. He also rejected a proposal to be a political party leader. He simply understood that the real struggle and the involvement in the opposition political life were two different things. Maybe, that was the reason why the capital opposition met Domash's pretension on being a leader without any passion, but also without any hostility. The majority understood that it was the case, when it was better to be friends than enemies. His popularity among the electorate was advantageous for the democratic forces. Domash was among the first hundred signees of Charter'97. He was elected to the National Executive Committee, organized by the opposition, the so-called "shadow" government.

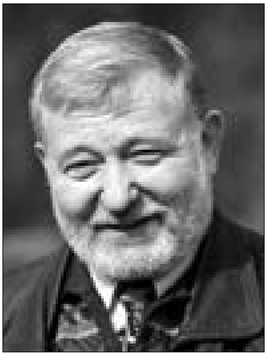
He was leaving the political stage gradually, without big words and statements. But he retained in the supporters" memory. Siamion Domash contributed to democratic changes, paved the way for the democratic changes, which will happen inevitably, sooner or later, one way or another, since it's an irresistible historical imperative. No doubt, the future historians will not pass over by their attention this period in the life of our country as well as Domash's place and role in the Belarusian history.

Domash's resignation from politics into his private life forced the author to write about such things that are usually not discussed in essays. However, it may be interesting to know that Domash is a candidate of sports in boxing. His wife Zoya worked at the *Belarusbank* Personnel department in Hrodna. His eldest son Zmitsier is a former military man and a master of sports in swimming. He worked for a Belarusian-Russian company for some time. The junior son Aliaksandr went in for swimming, too, and even performed the candidate's norms. He graduated from the Law Faculty of Hrodna University and worked in the banking field.

The fact that Siamion Domash is running a quite weak state enterprise again is regrettable, indeed. It is not only the matter of moral. The matter is that he did not have any other way out, but to agree to that position.

According to the explanatory dictionary of Belarusian, the leather-dressing occupation bears relation to leather goods and their trade. To put it mildly, it is not the sphere, which is a subject for studies at the Motor and Tractor Technical School. But if we do not think about it, it is possible to miss the obvious wish to humiliate the former opponent.

YURY KHADYKA, THE LEGEND OF REVIVAL



Prepared for publication on 01.02.2008

Khadyka lives close the author's place of residence. Sometimes, the author sees him going together with his wife to the Kamarouski market, which is also located nearby. But that is not the point. It is difficult to believe that this quiet and calm person is one of the most active figures of the Belarusian revival movement of the present time. Together with Zianon Pazniak and Mikhas Tkachou, he participated in establishing the Belarusian Popular Front during the Soviet times. He is a legend of the Belarusian Revival.

Here is an episode that one day will appear in the manuals of history. It is not only a striking episode, but it is outstanding due to its symbolic meaning. It personifies the end of the Soviet system in Belarus, despite the fact that it formally existed for two years afterwards. The *Dynamo* stadium in Minsk was overcrowded with people at a public meeting in January 1989. The gathering was organized by the Belarusian Popular Front with a permission and participation of Minsk city authorities. It happened for the first time in the Soviet history of Belarus. The event participants say that the general atmosphere at the stadium was characterized by stupefaction and enthusiasm. Thousands of humming and whistling voices praised the BPF speakers. Thousands of humming and whistling voices reproached the orators, who represented the official authorities.

The BPF activists demonstrated new stylistics of public speeches with vivid and emotional statements. It was completely unusual for the Soviet people. The concrete content of speeches was forgotten after a while, but the atmosphere and the striking emotional impressions remained in the people's memory.

Yury Khadyka's speech is recalled most frequently. He compared the storming of the Soviet stronghold with the storming of the medieval castle, surrounded with a deep ditch. The first knights threw themselves into the ditch, selflessly making a bridge of their bodies for their successors" attacks.
The comparison was perceived as a romantic hyperbola at that time. Nobody thought seriously about victims. It fell to Khadyka's lot to prove the stern truth of his words and intensions by his life and deeds. The Belarusian Popular Front gathered under its banners the most active part of the Belarusian society that strived for changes. The perestroika opened the locks.
Yury Khadyka was born in Minsk on June 23, 1938. His first childhood memories were connected with the war time. He was less than three years at that time. His father was a constructor. Therefore, the Khadykas moved to Vaukavysk, where the defensive fortifications were under construction along the boarder at that time. A part of these fortifications was restored as *Stalin's Line* museum complex several years ago.
On September 1, 1945, Yury Khadyka entered the unusual boys school No.60 in the Belarusian capital. He was given the *"professor"* nickname at this school. It is worth mentioning that he became a real professor much later.
Here is one more episode from Khadyka's childhood. At that post-war period There were frequent problems with electricity after the war. It was not a rare case that the light dimmed. Yury's classmates found an amazing way of electrical pauses on somebody's private wish. They unscrewed an electric light bulb, wetted with saliva a piece of blotter and put it to the lamp-socket. The saliva dried, the blotter turned into the insulating material, and the light became dim. However, the lesson was going on. The teacher asked the voluntary schoolchildren to retell the last book they had read. The Khadykas lived quite close to Pushkin Library at that time. (It was located behind the present-day Palace of the Republic.) In Khadyka's opinion, these oral presentations helped him every now and then.
Yury Khadyka graduated school with a "gold" medal and went to Moscow to enter Moscow Physical-and-Technical Institute (MFTI), established by Kapitsa. However, he received the so-called semi-pass mark that entitled him to join any other institution of higher learning

in Moscow. He had several options to choose from, but, finally, he listened to his mother's advice and came back to Minsk.

Khadyka graduated from Physics Department of the Belarusian State University in 1960. Then, he started to work as a junior research worker, a senior researcher, a group leader, and the head of laboratory at the Institute of Physics of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus. It was the main laboratory in the field of calculating the missile trajectory that participated in the All-Union program of cooperation on creating the space system for the early prevention of missile attacks.

In 1975, Khadyka headed the section of Optoelectronic Intelligence Devices at the Committee of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR that dealt with forecasting the arms development within 15 years.

In February 1965, he defended a Ph.D. thesis in Physical Aerodynamics. And in 1976, he became a professor and Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. His doctoral dissertation was dedicated to "The Optical Characteristics of Ballistic Missile Jets".

Yury Khadyka was proposed to join the Communist Party twice, in 1967 and 1969. However, he was "broken down" only in the year of 1981. The professor provided a profound explanation of this step in *The Differently Minded* book: *"...Yes, the attitude towards the Party was formed and propagated at that time, as...Well, like a vaccination against some social disasters. Among other nuances, I was stopped by a conviction that it was a "game", which allegedly bypassed the science. I was naive and conceitedly believed that I could achieve my goals and ensure the career without the Party-membership card. I was convinced that physics was not politics. The head is more important than the Party-membership card, I thought. Alas, my thoughts were corrected by life to some extent later on".*

The commitment to the Belarusian national idea came to him together with the keenness on the Belarusian art. Somebody asked Khadyka what he was proud of in his life at the beginning of 1990-ies. His reply was unexpected for many people. He said he was proud of his participation in establishing the Museum of Ancient Belarusian Culture at the Academy of Sciences of Belarus.

In the autumn of 1969, Khadyka arranged a seminar on exploring the ancient Belarusian art at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR. He participated in collecting the exhibition materials and compiling the book on "The Code of Monuments of History and Culture of Belarus".

The famous Museum was opened in 1979. Yury Khadyka opened the profundity and mysteries of Belarusian history with its dramatic changes and tragic destinies as well as with the names of Belarusian revival movement founders to the public.

Yury Khadyka belonged to a small group of pioneer organizers and theorists of the Belarusian Revival Movement at the end of the 20th century.

The sadly known *Dziady* meeting took place on March 30, 1988. Despite being a CPSU member, Khadyka began to organize a group in support of the BPF organizing committee at his Institute. Around 70 people joined the group within a short period of time. Khadyka ceased his membership in the Communist Party on his own wish in February 1990. But he had become a democratic activist already in 1988. In a year, he was elected a Deputy Chairman of the BPF *Revival* civil movement.

Since 1996 till 2000, Khadyka was a member of the Observation Council of Belarusian Helsinki Committee. In 1997, he was appointed to the position of Vice Rector of the *People's University*, the largest program of *The Belarusian Perspective* Public Scientific and Analytical Center. At the same time, he edited the bulletin of the People's University. In 1998, Khadyka joined the editorial team of *The Open Society* magazine. Also, he was elected a Deputy Chairman of the Observation Council of the Independent Institute of Social-Economic and Political Studies.

Apparently, the year of 1996 can be regarded as the most outstanding and at the same time the most dramatic year in Khadyka's political biography. The year was marked with the famous *Charnobyl Shliakh*, first of all. On April 26, the victims of Chernobyl disaster were traditionally commemorated. It is worth mentioning that eventually the event gained a political connotation of fighting against the manifestations of *"political Chernobyl"* in the country. The rally route was approved by police chiefs in Genadz Karpenka office. (He was Deputy Chairman of Supreme Soviet of Belarus at that time. Yury Khadyka was present at the meeting. The rally participants followed the approved route. However, the official authorities broke their promises. All of a sudden, the riot police with shields and rubber clubs appeared in front of the rally participants. The authorites provoked collisions during the rally. Khadyka was arrested for them later. A political emigrant Zianon

Pazniak attended the rally in Minsk, all of a sudden. He proposed to commemorate the assassinated Chechen General Dudayev. Over 50,000 participants took part in the rally. It was the last time in modern Belarusian history, when the Belarusian opposition managed to gather so many people under their banners.

Yury Khadyka and his fellow party member Viashaslau Siuchyk were put behind bars after the *"hot"* spring of 1996. The official authorites were waiting for their repentance, but they got an announcement of unlimited hunger strikes instead. It was an action of real courage and self-sacrifice. A strong solidarity movement was arranged to defend the professor and the politician. The solidarity actions included manifestations near the prison in Valadarski Street in Minsk and a stream of protest letters from politicians, public activists, and scientists from Belarus, Russia, and other countries. The leader of Yabloko party (Russia) Grigoriy Yavlinskiy asked the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin to help to release Yury Khadyka and Viachaslau Siuchyk. Reportedly, Yeltsin called Lukashenka. Consequently, the prisoners were released.

According to the above-mentioned reference book, Khadyka has written about 150 scientific papers on Physics, about 200 scientific and technical reports as well as about 40 publications on the History of the Belarusian Art. Morevoer, Khadyka has prepared more than 300 publications on burning political topics.

Thus, Khadyka has always been almost equally devoted to physics and "lyrics". However, most people know him as a politician, indeed, since his public recognition has become possible, due to his perfect reputation and personal qualities, first of all.

MIKHAS TKACHOU, A SCIENTIST AND A POLITICIAN



Prepared for publication on 05.02.2008

The so-called "reconstruction" began in Hrodna in the autumn of 2006. A bulldozer was the main instrument of that "reconstruction". Aleh TRUSAU, Ph.D. in History, a famous archeologist, and the Chairman of the Belarusian Language Society public association described the event in details: "Historical monuments are destroyed, first of all, in those towns, where the public consciousness is sleeping. Hrodna was the center of the national revival at the end of 1980-ies. There weren't any problems there, when the Pakhodnia (The Torch) historical and cultural club led by Mikhas Tkachou was active and Aliaksandr Milinkevich was responsible for the cultural heritage as a Vice-mayor of Hrodna. However, Tkachou passed away, Pakhodnia came apart, and Milinkevich got involved in politics..."

Mikhas Tkachou was born on March 10, 1942 in the town of Mstsislau, Mahilou region. His father died in the same year not far away from Leningrad. His mother and stepfather were bringing up the boy. He graduated from Mstsislau secondary school No. 3 with three "good" marks in his school certificate. All the other marks were "excellent" at that. Then, he submitted documents to the Department of History at the Belarusian State University. It happened that the Ministry of Education conducted a new experiment at that time. The high school graduates, who didn't have two years of work experience, had to study the first year by correspondence.
Mikhas had only 14 months of work experience. He got it during summer holidays, working at local brickworks, starting from the sixth form. He lacked ten months. Therefore, as soon as he entered the

University, he returned home to work at *Varashylau* collective farm. He planted potatoes, shoveled hay, and cleaned stalls for cows.

Tkachou was a Secretary of Komsomol organization at the collective farm. The district Komsomol organization was led by Aliaksei Kamai. Both of them became ideological opponents, as soon as the letter was appointed the Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus.

Among other, Mikhas Tkachou treated the historical science as a means for implementation of ideas of Belarusian cultural and national revival. The history of his native Mstsislau district attracted him in particular. Tkachou dedicated his diploma thesis to the historical past of his district. He defended it with an excellent mark.

He gathered the nationally consciousness intellectuals during the student years. The first perestroika rays stirred up a new wave of the Belarusian national revival movement. Tkachau and his supporters organized the *Pakhodnia* club as well as the local branches of the Belarusian Popular Front and the Belarusian Social Democrat Gramada.

They were not preparing a revolution and they were not making plans to seize power. It was an ordinary informal community of like-minded people that accepted new members very cautiously with the consideration of abilities to perceive the national revival ideas. Among other, the community members were trying to find rare historical books by Vatslau Lastouski, Usievalad Ihnatouski and others wherever it was possible. The books had been forbidden since the end of the 1920-ies. The community members had a long-term ovjective for themselves and their descendants. They intended to introduce the nationally conscious people to the state and Communist Party structures, in order to prepare and carry out the irreversible democratic changes in the evolutional way. It is worth mentioning that Mikhas Tkachou agreed to join the CPSU on getting consent from his community members only.

As soon as Mikhas Tkachou graduated from the University, he was directed to work at a new school in the *Zarechcha* sovkhoz, located near Zhodzina, Minsk region. The school became his home for five years: he lectured history and led the Teaching department there. He was young, tall, athletic-looking, and a good mixer. He was adored by his pupils and respected by colleagues. Mikhas played volleyball and basketball in combined teams and participated in amateur

performances. He sang, danced, played the accordion and even wrote refrains. He got married and their son was born there, too. He was leading the usual Soviet style of life. The young family, consisting of three people, got accommodated in a small room of eleven square meters at the school dorm. At the same time, he managed to ensure decent financial conditions for his family. Thus, he was paid for leading the Teaching department. He lectured on Political Economy at the Bookkeepers" Advanced Courses. Also, he lectured on Philosophy at the BSU Evening Department. He seemed to get drowned in the routine, from which few teachers managed to break out. Mikhas broke out. He was driven by his mission, his dreams, his talent, and his character that required movement, deeds, new roads, and storming of new heights.

Tkachou's wife understood it very well, when he decided to enter the post-graduate studies with the modest scholarship of 100 rubles. Mikhas passed the qualifying examination for the Ph.D. degree at the Academy of Sciences. According to Tkachou, he was not allowed to do it at his alma mater by the sadly known Laurentsij Abetsedarski, who led the Department of History of Belarus at that time. (Tkachou mentioned the reason in his interview for *"The Differently Minded"* book in 1991.)

In 1968, Tkachou became a research worker for the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of Belarus. It took him three years to write and defend his Ph.D. thesis that happens rather seldom. He had chosen Archeology and he didn't give it up until his last breath. He gained authority and fame among scientists and common people. His scientific monograph books *The Castles of Belarus* (Minsk, 1987) and *The Castles and People* (Minsk, 1991) became bestsellers. Basing on historial grounds, he managed to put ancient castles into the context of contemporary life, to change them into intellectual citadels of the new wave of Belarusian revival.

Everything was fine with Tkachou's work at the Academy of Sciences. However, the accommodation problem remained to be immensely acute. The family had been queuing for more than ten years with no result at all. It was a decisive factor for him and his family to move to Hrodna, when he was proposed a lecturer's position at the newly established University there in 1978. He started to work as an associate professor and a professor there. In 1983, he was appointed the Head of Department.

As a historian, Mikhas Tkachou was fond of the ancient Belarusian town of Hrodna a lot. He called it a museum under the open air. However, he was distressed by the fact that local dwellers knew the history of their native town rather superficially. Unfortunately, it is a very widespread problem in today's Belarus, too. But when somebody calls the Belarusian people mankurts, let him think about the reasons. A deliberate official policy of extermination and misrepresentation of historical memory lasted for hundreds of years. The ugly efforts were not in vain. The time is needed to restore the people's memory.

It was in Hrodna that Tkachou got closely acquainted with the above-mentioned former deputy of the Supreme Soviet Aleg Trusau. They discovered the following by common efforts. Due to archeological excavations, the scientists came to a conclusion that the site of ancient settlement (dziatsinec) of Grodna had been surrounded by the wall in the 12th century that was really unique for that time.

Mikhas Tkachou used his historical education to solve contemporary tasks.

He founded the famous *Pakhodnia* club that united a wide circle of people, who adored the Belarusian history. It is interesting that the local City Committee of the Communist Party translated the name of the club to Russian as *"wanderers"*. Consequently, Mikhas Tkachou and a biologist Mikola Taranda were called to the Party Committee for *"a talk"*. They had to explain to the Party bosses that the word *"pakhodnia"* was also from the historical treasury, and that its meaning differed from the meaning that had so much frightened the Party nomenclature. Though, actually, it had a much more dangerous meaning of a torch that lightens up the way.

The chief architect of Grodna brought an action against Tkachou *"for casting aspersions on bodies of the Soviet authorities".* Tkachou stood up for saving the so-called *Switzerland valley* in the historic part of Hrodna.

The local nomenclature had a desire to to build a grand Lenin Square with a new building for the City Committee of the Communist Party there. The historians opposed to this perspective and won the victory.

Unfortunately, *"the bulldozer restoration"* continues in Belarus nowadays. It goes without saying that it doesn't bring respect to the history of our country. Once again, the author would like to refer to A.Trusau's words in this respect:

"No changes will happen, until *Pakhodnia* with an informal leader is restored to life and the local intellectuals start their systematic activity with the population. Tkachou's students are university professors nowadays. They must be the first to sound the alarm.'

The famous *Dziady-88* played the role of a catalyst in the process of forming the Belarusian Popular Front *Adradzhenne.* The *Martyrologist of Belarus* and the BPF organization committee were established at Minsk Cinema House, located in the premises of the Red Catholic Church in the city centre of Minsk at that time. Mikhas Tkachou came to Minsk from Hrodna especially for that occasion, as he could not but come. De facto he was still the CPSU member, but de jure he was an ideological opponent of the Communist Party.

On that very year the election of deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR took place in the country. Mikhas Tkachou was nominated as a candidate by the working collective of the famous *Azote* enterprise, but he could not participate in the election because of his sickness. Tkachou was beaten unmercifully at his porch. It is clear to everyone that it was done by the *"unknown"* people. The author is not going to guess, who ordered the attack, but it was Siamionau, the future First Secretary of Hrodna Regional Committee of the Communist Party, who won the election.

The winds of changes started blowing stronger though. Tkachou's fame and reputation had already achieved the state scale by then. At the same time his reasonableness, restraint, understanding of political situation, and smart anticipation of its development as well as his mastery of diplomacy did not frighten the weakening Soviet nomenclature with radicalism.

In 1989, he was proposed to come back to Minsk, in order to lead the editorial of *The Belarusian Encyclopedia* publishing house. In March 1992, he took the position of the publishing house Editor-in-chief.

It was exactly under Tkachou's management that the publishing house faced the period of its best achievements. It got rid of ideological clichés, censorship, and came closer to the accepted international standards, grounded on the detailed discussions, objectiveness, and factual accuracy.

The Constituent Assembly of the Belarusian Popular Front took place in Vilnius in 1989. Being among the BPF founders, Mikhas Tkachou was elected a Deputy Chairman of BPF *Adradzhenne.*

He even had time to participate in the establishment of the multi-party democratic system in Belarus. On Tkachou's initiative and due to his efforts, the Belarusian Social Democracy was renewed in March 1991. The Belarusian Social Democrat Gramada was revived. The party had been exterminated by the Bolsheviks in 1918.

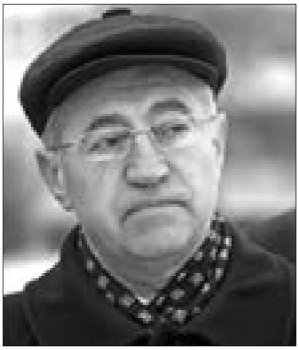
Mikhas Tkachou became the Chairman of the BSDG Central Council. Luckily, he had time to formulate, to express, and initiate the idea of uniting all political forces of social-democratic orientation. (In particular, he was eager to unite efforts with the Party of People's Concord, led by Genadz Karpenka at that time), but he lacked time to put the idea into practice.

All of a sudden, Mikhas Tkachou passed away on October 31, 1992. Few people knew that he had a chronic problem with his kidneys. He had never complained about the health problems even to his close friends and worked without breaks.

The memorial service was held at the House of Literary Men on November 3, 1992. Thousands of people came there that confirmed the people's great respect and love to that genuine patriot of Belarus.

He died at the age of 50. But he had managed to do a lot. His scientific papers were published for several years. The posthumous edition of his book under the symbolic title of *Pakhodnia* appeared in 1994.

Mikhas Tkachou had time to set fire to his torch. He had time to see the realization of his dreams about free, independent, and democratic Belarus. And he had time to put a lot of important stones into its foundation to ensure that all deviations from the way would be nothing but temporary phenomena.



ALIAKSANDR VAITOVICH, ACADEMICIAN AND A POLITICIAN

Prepared for publication on 17.03.2008

It was the second unpleasant incident for 20 years of my journalist practice. I was preparing a publication for Without Politics newspaper section and asked Aliaksandr Vaitovich to tell the readers about his hobby. (He has always been keen on science.) The former President of the National Academy of Sciences was describing for an hour the sophisticated matters of scientific importance to the author. However, a real misfortune happened a bit later, when the author realized that the Dictaphone had been switched off all the time.

The author had to call Aliaksandr Vaitovich and beg his pardon for the inadvertency. In two days, the Academician and the former chairman of the Soviet of the Republic at the National Assembly of Belarus in 2000-2003 came to the ashamed author once again and repeated his story. However, every stick has two ends.

Due to inattentiveness, the author had an opportunity to listen to Aliaksandr Vaitovich about his first scientific discovery once again. Being a young father, the beginning scientist was washing swaddling bands in a bath. It was just a mechanical job, but Vaitovich's head was working on some other issues. He pondered over the possibility to control the laser-generated spectrum of X-rays. Vaitovich proposed to *"displace the laser to the medium of absorption to receive the required frequency".* The effect was impressive. By the way, that idea became the main idea of his Ph.D. thesis, which he defended in 1968. He was thirty then. Not too early, but not late either.

Aliaksandr Vaitovich was born on January 5, 1938 in the village Rachkievichy, Kapyl district, Minsk region. His primary school was located in his native village, but the secondary school was placed in a

big peasant house. Four first forms had simultaneous lessons in one and the same class room. Two teachers worked at that school.

He was in the second form, when a fire happened at the school. He dashed from the building twice, enveloped in flames. For the first time, he ran out with all the pupils. Then, he returned to the burning biulding with his sister's coat.

Vaitovich was still a school pupil, when he decided to become a physicist. He graduated from school with a "gold" medal. He went to take his entrance exams to the Belarusian State University. The applicants with "gold" medals were granted a possibility to enter the institution of higher learning without exams at that time. It was only necessary to be interviewed by the admissions committee members. It is worth mentioning that Vaitovich didn't speak Russian at that time. He spoke Belarusian only. But he learnt the *"great and mighty"* Russian language at the University. He graduated from the higher school with honours in 1960.

Then, he began to work at the Institute of Physics at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR. Among other, he worked as a junior research worker, a senior design engineer, a chief engineer, a senior researcher, the head of laboratory, and a Deputy Director on Scientific Work. He worked at the Institute of Physics for about 32 years. Afterwards, he was appointed the Director of the Institute of Molecular and Atomic Physics, established with his direct participation. Three years later the height of his scientific career was achieved. Aliaksandr Vaitovich was elected President of the Academy of Sciences of Belarus. He replaced the Academician Barysevich, who had noticed and coached the young talented scientist, since his first day at the Academy.

Vaitovich's list of scientific regalia included such positions as a Doctor of Physical and Mathematical Sciences (1979), a Professor (1985), and a Correspoding Member of the Academy of Sciences (1986). He became an Academician of the National Academy of Sciences of Belarus ten years later. Besides, he was elected a Full Member of the European Academy of Sciences, Art and Philology in 1995. Later on he became a Vice-president of the European Physical Society. The scientists say that Vaitovich's researches in the field of magnetic optics and dynamics of lasers have radically changed the existing concepts of laser properties.

In 1996, Aliaksandr Vaitovich was presented the State Award of Belarus for his cycle of scientific papers on *"The Anisotropy Phenomena in*

Lasers and the Principles of polarization of laser spectroscopy".
When Vaitovich managed the Academy of Sciences, he got it very quickly that it wasn't possible to change anything in science without a kind permission from the authorities. (It is worth mentioning that elections at the Academy were held on the real alternative basis.) It might have been the reason for him to agree to lead the Soviet of the Republic at the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus.
Vaitovich told the author that it had happened, when he was on a business trip to Chicago in the United States of America.
A.Lukashenka's advisor Makei phoned to the Academician's hotel room at 5 o'clock in the morning. He urged Vaitovich to come back to Minsk as soon as possible. The scientist returned to the Belarusian capital in 24 hours since then. He went to the Presidential residence directly from the airport. Makei did not give him time even to go home, in order to tidy up. Lukashenka proposed the Academician to lead the Soviet of the Republic.
Before giving his consent, Aliaksandr Vaitovich collected those members of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences, whom he managed to find quickly, to get their advice. The colleagues recommended Vaitovich unanimously to agree to this proposal. They believed that the new position would provide more possibilities to influence upon the governmental policies in the field of science. Unfortunately, the scientists were badly mistaken.
On December 19, 2000, Vaitovich was elected the Chairman of the Soviet of the Republic at the National Assembly of Belarus of the second convocation. In two years and a half, on July 28, 2003 he was dismissed from this position by the Presdient's decree. The former Prime-Minister Genadz Navitski was unanimously elected to the post instead of Vaitovich.
It was officially explained that Aliaksandr Vaitovich was 65 at that moment. (It's the official age limit for public service in Belarus.) Everybody understood that it was a formal motivation. The real reason was in science, or speaking more precisely, in the approaches towards the management of science from the side of official authorities. The matter was that all Presidents of the Academy of Sciences had been elected, but Lukashenka decided to appoint them, all of a sudden. He even did not ask Vaitovich's advice. Moreover, Ural Latypov, the head of the Presidential Administration, informed him that if he wished to remain in the Soviet of

the Republic, he should have supported the President's decision. Vaitovich failed to support it. All his attempts to clear out something were in vain. The guards said the President had ceased to play hockey on learning about the decision. Vaitovich fell into disgrace. The experienced people say that it's highly important to show your loyalty to the ruler in such a case, in order to save the situation. Vaitovich decided to struggle.

He became the leader of *For Free Elections* civil initiative that monitored the Parliamentary elections in 2004. The monitors registered a large number of serious breaches of law.

Vaitovich had a desire to participate in the 2006 Presidential elections. He even created a pre-election Web-resource for the election campaign. However, he terminated his participation in the election campaign and asked everybody to boycott the elections in January. At that moment his initiative group had already collected about 30,000 signatures of citizens in his support.

Motivating his decision, Vaitovich noted as follows: *"I wouldn't like to contribute to the formation of illusions that Lukashenka's participation in the elections for the third period is legal and that the elections are carried out according to the Constitution and the Election Code of the country".*

It should be reminded that the Academician Vaitovich together with General Fralou and ex-Minister Liavonau declared the establishment of a non-Party democratic coalition in the summer of 2005. The Coalition building was firstly aimed at preventing Lukashenka from his participation in the 2006 Presidential election. The Coalition members dreamt about getting support from the official Russian authorities. All these declarations look quite naïve nowadays. However, they are also dangerous, since they insist on the exclusive role of Russia in solving the Russian problems.

On January 17, 2007, the *"Cooperation and Progress"* International Civil Movement, led by Vaitovich, was set up in Moscow. Surprisingly, nobody has ever heard anything about the Movement again since then. The author would like to be mistaken, but the press recollects more and more often Aliaksandr Vaitovich's name in connection with the planned construction of the nuclear power plant in Belarus, but not in connection with some "cooperation" and "progress".



TATSIANA PROTSKA, A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Prepared for publication on 19.03.2008

Taking into consideration that some people treat Tatsiana Protska negatively, the author would like to begin the essay with unpleasant moments from her life. A group of opponents of Tatsiana Protska left the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and founded a new public association Helsinki XXI after rather tough discussions with financial claims in 2000. The author is not going even to try to find some truth, because, as we all know, everybody has its own truth. Therefore, the author is leaving all personal views aside. The only thing should be noted in this respect. The new association appeared to be a virtual one. At the same time, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee continued to work actively in Belarus.

Tatsiana Protska was born in Minsk on February 8, 1951. Her parents were journalists, and, maybe, it was her family atmosphere that formed almost since her childhood the strong desire to be in the very epicenter of events. At first, Tatsiana studied at school № 27, and later on, she studied at the well-known school № 103, from which she graduated with a "gold" medal.
She entered the evening Department of Physics at the Belarusian State University. She worked during the day and studied in the evenings. It meant for her that from early in the morning till late at night she stayed at the Belarusian State University, because she worked at the same place where she studied. In particular, she was employed as a technician since the year of 1968 and as an engineer and at the Chair of Physics of Semiconductors since 1972.

At first, Protska was the head of Komsomol organizations that united the University staff and students. Then, she was elected the chief of the trade union organization at the Chair of Physics of Semiconductors.
Having graduated from the University in 1974, she entered the post-graduate studies at the Institute of Philosophy and Law. She defended her PhD in Philosophy there in 1983. After that she got a position at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR.
Tatsiana Protska found her own vocation in History in combination with journalism and public activity. There had been interim topics until she came to the main scholar issue of her life. She devoted almost ten years to studying the Soviet totalitarian regime in Belarus. It resulted in a thorough monograph on 600 pages on *"Formation of the Soviet totalitarian system in Belarus (1917-1941)"*, published in 2002.
For the time being, it is the only scientific research in the Belarusian historiography. This is understandable, since nobody could like such a sensitive topic at that time. For obvious reasons, few scientific officials are keen on the topic nowadays, too. The monograph contained a lot of original materials from the BSSR and Moscow KGB archives.
The historian Tatsiana Protska was lucky enough to be included into a small group of investigators, who managed to achieve admittance to the archives depository, tightly sealed up for seventy years, during a short perestroika periof. The doors of the Belarusian KGB were tightly closed again in a short while.
After such a solid monograph, one could stop writing anything at all, being convinced that the main deed of your life got fulfilled. The author's name was added to the Belarusian historiography for ever. However, the author knows that Tatsiana Protska decided to continue her work on the second part of the topic. The author would like to wish her every success on this occasion.
The beginning of 1990-ies was the time of hopes for reforms. It was the period of active public activity. It stimulated a lot of people to search a new field of civil work. In 1992, Protska transferred from the Academic Institute of History to the Belarusian State Radio Company, where she worked as a political commentator and the Chief Editor of *Our Past* radio journal as well as. However, the reforms started changing their colors soon.
On May 14, 1995, the first referendum took place in Belarus. Among other, the voters had to answer a question about substitution of state

symbols. Among other, it was proposed to change the historical white-red-white banner to the red and green flag that dates back to Stalin's times.

Next day after the Referendum, the former Manager of Presidential Affairs Ivan Tsitsankou climbed up the roof of the Presidential Administration building, tore to pieces the white-red-white flag that was still the state flag at that time, and wrote something on them. Moreover, Tsitsiankou made a video record of his actions. It was an important fact, since later on began to insist that nothing like that had ever happened. The videotape served as a proof that it had really happened. Somebody had managed to make copies of this video material before the original was strangely *"demagnetized"*.

Protska learnt about the accident on the roof of the Presidential administration building at a regular World Congress of Belarusians that took place in Minsk at that time. Together with Zmitser Sanko, she appealed to the Prosecutor General with a demand to institute proceedings against Tsitsiankou for destroying the national flag of Belarus. The investigation lasted for about a month. It was run by Stanislau Novikau, who dealt with elaborating the Mass Media Law of Belarus later. As it was expected, he did not find any criminal deeds in Tsitsiankou's actions. Nobody was prosecuted for the obvious crime.

The gloomy situation motivated Tatsiana Protska to establish the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, since it was obvious that it was necessary to unite efforts in order to stand up for truth and human rights. The BHC constituent meeting was held on October 12, 1995. The Ministry of Justice of Belarus handed over a registration certificate to the leaders of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee on November 1, 1995.

The *OSCE* Advisory and Monitoring Group started its work in Belarus in 1998. It was led by Hans-Georg Wieck. The Group intended to monitor and promote democratic changes in Belarus by means of organizing the negotiating process between the government and the democratic opposition in the country. The policy gave birth to the well-known *"step-by-step strategy"*.

Tatsiana Protska took part in the negotiations. From the very beginning, there were lots of discussions concerning the expediency of this step, because everybody, including the BHC management, understood very well that it would be simply impossible to launch any kind of civilized dialogue with regime in power.

However, the author believes that the opposition members, who thought absolutely negatively of the negotiations made a mistake. As it was expected, the President's side *"killed"* the negotiations, but it was a result, too. The author is sure that almost all present-day economic and political sanctions were born exactly at that time, when the real counterproductive position of governmental authorities became absolutely clear to everyone, just the same as their attitude towards the signed resolutions at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul and their attitude towards the signed international agreements in general.

Due to establishing the Belarusian Helsinki Committee Tatsiana Protska, actually, became the pioneer of the human rights movement in Belarus. The BHC activities brought wide fame and reputation to the organization in Belarus and abroad. Still, the fame brought problems that started to appear every now and then.

The Belarusian Helsinki Committee faced a problem with the tax inspection in 2004. The organization did not receive any new European grants. The Committee was doing everything in a transparent and legal way. However, the Presidium of the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus suddenly found some illegal signs in the BHC activity in December 2005. In particular, the claims concerned the received EU grants. By the end of 2005, the Belarusian side hadn't charged any taxes from NGO activities. However, all of a sudden, it was considered to be a mistake. Consequently, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee was proposed to pay a huge sum to cover the previously unpaid taxes to the state budget.

It was only due to the highly negative reaction, expressed by the international community and organizations, that the case was suspended. The first session on the case had to take place in the Supreme Court of Belarus on November 28, 2006. However, it was adjourned till the following year. Later on the case against the Belarusian Helsinki Committee was closed at all. It doesn't mean though that it will never be reanimated by some ill-wisher in the future.

Tatsiana Protska had led the Belarusian Helsinki Committee since the day of its foundation till the spring of 2008, when she asked the BHC Board to release her from office. The Board didn't support the application, but the resignation took place automatically, according to the BHC Statutory Notes.


СТОЙ!
ПРЕТНАЯ ЗОНА!
ДЪЯВИ ПРОПУСК!

FROM THE BOOK "THE AWAKENERS"

ENIRA BRANITSKAYA



Prepared for publication on 05.10.2007

Enira Branitskaya was born on the 31st of August 1981 in Minsk. In 1998, she finished gymnasium and entered the Law Department of BSU. She graduated in 2003 with honors and entered the postgraduate studies. After her arrest she was excluded from the University.

— Your name is very rare. What does it mean?

— I was called after my grandmother. And her name was just invented. It was time when people liked to unite different letters. This is an "official" version, but I think that the name appeared first and after it the letters where decoded in accordance with trends of that time the following way — Electrification, Science, Art, and Revolution.

— ***To tell the truth it's a little bit unexpected…***

— My grandmother had no problems with it. But when my father went to register me he was told that such name didn't exist and he was shown some dictionaries, and they refused to register. But he said that his mother-in-law had such name and they finally agreed.

— And now I would like to ask you how you came to such life. Let's start from "Partnership".

— I started to work in "Partnership" during the parliamentary elections in 2004. At that moment the organization had already existed for two years. They tried to register it in the Ministry of Justice, but got the refuse. "Partnership" was created as organization which deals with public and social problems.

In 2003 they made the first attempt to observe at local elections, and a year later they did it once again but in significantly larger scope. At that time I had heard about it for the first time. One of the main

figures in the organization was Mikalay Astreika, at the University we studied at the same group. Once I came to talk to him about some civic questions, but during our conversation we made a decision about my work in the organization.

— Later the presidential elections were held before which you were put into prison.

— Yes

We existed as a civic initiative, but in September 2005 a new resolution of the Ministry of Justice appeared, which put all the unregistered organizations out of law. We had another attempt to register, but during the constituent assembly we were all detained. Later four of us were arrested for acting on behalf of the unregistered organization. But we even were not given the opportunity to register. Such things can happen only in our country.

It happened on the 21st of February 2006, 1,5 months before the presidential elections.

— Please, remind some details.

— At first they charged us with the leading the unregistered organization which "infringes upon citizens rights and freedoms". The matter was the following — as if we created some fake documents and wanted to spread them.

— Many people laughed at that situation. You have to be a complete idiot — to create fake document and to store it in computer on your desktop.

— It wasn't very funny for us. Because on the basis of those documents they accused us of coup d'état.

— May be it was even good that you were arrested before the episode with the rats, with the help of which some people wanted to poison water...

— The investigator made some suggestions that our Article could be changed to another one which would be much more serious. I saw about the rats on TV. We had one in our cell.

Before the process (it started on the 28th of July, five months after the arrest) we were charged with what I told about before, but then we managed to prove that all those documents were a complete fake and have nothing in common with our organization, After it the Article was changed and we were charged only with the acting on behalf of the unregistered organization. But they didn't manage to prove it as well. I

was sentenced to 6 months of arrest. In two weeks after the sentence I was released.

It's the fact, that the charge with creating and spreading the fake documents is obviously absurd. But it was necessary in order to keep us in pre-trial prison before the process. As far as I think, they just wanted to isolate us.

At first I spent three months in KGB pre-trial prison, after it me and Aliaksandar Shalaika were transferred to "Valadarka". Dranchuk and Astreika spent all the time before the process in KGB. I can't understand till now the reasons why.

— And where are the conditions better?

— Definitely in KGB. The cells there are counted for four people, and in "Valadarka" — 6, 8 and 15. Men's cells are overcrowded, there can be up to 30 people in one cell which was built for 15. They sleep in turns. I've heard a lot about "Valadarka" in KGB, and didn't want to be transferred there, but everything turned out to be not so bad. Of course it's much worse there mainly because of its size. KGB pre-trial is smaller. Cook there prepares food for 50 people and in "Valadarka" for several thousands. Another level of security — in KGB they are all educated, almost all study in higher educational establishments. They were not rude. Walks there are longer. Parcels are better. Shopping is made in regular stores. You make a list of what you need and special person buys everything what is allowed.

The cells are much cleaner there. In "Valadarka" they are not. The humidity is very high, you almost can't see any daylight. The people who sit there are much simpler, they got there mainly for theft, drugs and family violence.

— What is their attitude to political prisoners?

— In KGB the security knew what we were arrested for, but there was no special treatment. The other people were there mainly for economical crimes. There I understood that you can be put into prison at any moment and almost for everything. We have no completely secure jobs in our country and half of convicts can be counted as "political".

The situation in "Valadarka" differed a lot. People say that there prisoners don't like "political" at all, but I wouldn't say so. They think the way our television is providing them with information. And they think that all opposition in our country has sold itself. No, they don't like President, personally I haven't met such people who said they like

him. But to some things they have different attitude. Young people better understand what is going on in our country, people who are older stupidly believe official propaganda. They don't like much of what is happening, but have no wish to try to change something.

— Why do you need all this?

— Long time ago I came to youth organization "New Group" which had some voluntary projects. I went to France to the center of handicapped, to Ireland where we worked with children from regions with local conflicts. We wanted to do the same in Belarus. For example we worked with children's hospice. But the organization was closed by the authorities. Officially we had some problems with our seals, which the authorities gave us themselves. Absurd. And unofficially they told us that they didn't like that we sent young people abroad. Besides we had a project "Legal help to citizens". And Aleg Vouchak was the head of the organization. The authorities didn't like it as well.

For me all that was absolutely weird. Before that when I heard about some political "cleaning" I thought that in such cases politics fights against politics. And in our case the organization which had absolutely nothing in common with politics was closed on some unclear political grounds. At that moment I understood that something wrong is happening in our country.

I studied political science in the University. Went in regular schools, made agreements with the principals and held meetings devoted to human rights and always thought it was a normal practice. I came to "Partnership" because I thought the election observation is a normal practice. When in our country people can get in prison for their political views I can't count such country a democratic one.

— Person thinks a lot behind the bars. What where you thinking about?

— About relatives and friends. I try to stick to the principal that everyone can do whatever he wants, and I don't blame people for what they do. Many of my friends didn't show me any support. My parents supported me a lot, the same with my husband, (at that time we were not married yet). He doesn't share some of my political views. The worst thing was to realize that their life had changed too because of my imprisonment.

— Was any pressure exerted on them?

— No. My Father works at Minsk Tractor Plant. Mother is a teacher of music. As far as I know her director told her his opinion about the

situations and nothing more. They suffered more from understanding that they can't help me.

— Very often you can hear that our countrymen who live abroad for a long time, when return to Belarus eat national food. What did you do when you were released?

— I didn't want to eat something special. The first thing I did — went home with my relatives and friends and we were talking for a long time. And then for several days I was just enjoying the feeling of freedom. Communicated with friends, spent time with my future husband.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT.

There is the famous saying of one of the leaders of Polish "Solidarity": the one who loves his country has to be prepared to go for it to prison. Enira Branitskaya by her own example showed the readiness to do it, and continues to fight so that no one would have to do it any more.

VALERY DRANCHUK



Prepared for publication on 12.09.2007

Valery Dranchuk was born in the isolated farmstead Gaviazna on the border of Stoubtsy and Niasvizh districts in 1951. He graduated from the Department of Journalism at the Belarusian State University in 1974. He is a human rights defender, a founder, a publisher, and the editor of "Belavezhskaya Pushcha" newspaper.

— Please remind us how you got to know that your son was arrested.

— In an hour after his arrest my daughter Julia called me and told: Tsimafei was detained by KGB, there was a search in his apartment, look what "wrong" things you have because they can come and search your apartment as well. Although Tsimokh lived separately we thought that they could search our apartment where he is registered and where I keep a lot of materials published by him in the 90th, they are a kind of a relic for me. I have lots of my "green" literature, no one knows what KGB could cavil at. The reason of his arrest wasn't clear at that time. Of course I didn't burn everything, but some document I hid. It was the 21st of February, one month before the elections. In several hours I saw in internet that the authorities decided to destroy "Partnership". At that time it was difficult to imagine that we would face a whole year of difficulties. That this arrest of young people would become the main special operation aimed at frightening of Belarusian people before the elections.

As a planed continuation we all saw famous conference which was shown on TV almost every day till the day of elections. Where Sukharenka, former head of KGB, told "the truth" about coup d'état in our country, which had been prepared by the enemies of Belarus. Unforgettable and

very difficult impression. It was seen from the screen what fear of truth distorted their faces — I saw all them as dummies in uniforms. They told awful lies. Two days before I went to Kupala theatre to see "Symon Musica", and there was a wonderful episode which impressed me much: men stood in line and started to beat the drums — hollow barrels. And that scene repeated for me once again on TV. After the theatre I wanted to buy Tsimafei tickets, but the next day he was arrested.

— It was his wife's birthday, as far as I know.

— He left home to buy flowers, but returned in handcuffs with KGB agents, two of them were wearing masks. And this is not a coincidence. That was the same style, same tradition, they wanted to destroy that day, those flowers. They knew exactly that Olga was in her last months of pregnancy. Later I over and over again saw their skills of humiliation. For them it is the highest level of professionalism.

— And you started to fight for your son's freedom…

— From the very first day. All my personal concerns were put aside. My main aim was to defend the honor of my son, to free him from prison. And it was not only for him, but for all four of them. I knew Astreika from the time when Tsimafei studied at lyceum. They were friends. Many times I had an opportunity to talk with his mother — Iauhenia, very nice and wonderful woman. At that time we were united by one problem: our children were the hostages of the authorities. Pre-trial prison, colony — this is a great trouble. It's a nightmare. For every one, for every family, every mother and father. You have to do something, fight for their rights, start to fight against the regime.

One of the first steps was the meeting with human rights defenders Liudmila Griaznova and Garry Paganiaila. It was Sunday and we met at a coffee house. I came with my wife and daughter. Got acquainted with Vialetta — mother of Enira Branitskaya and Kolia's wife — Palina. We all wanted to know the legal side of the case, what we had to do. What questions to arise and so on. It is clear that we live in the state which is far from democratic and following legal principles, but we wanted to know everything about our rights. It was already clear that the authorities didn't want to close the case of "Partnership", we had to prepare for a long fight.

We had a discussion about the position of parents: wouldn't the position of protest make more harm to our children? But from the other point of view how we could fight for our children — political prisoners — and

at the same time to be loyal to the regime? I felt that not everyone is ready to make some active moves, some of them thought: what if they would start to revenge, and our children are there? It's a usual thing to care about children and the authorities use it. Garry Paganiaila, a person having huge experience, said that we didn't have to be afraid and that we had to say things our children couldn't. He offered to act actively. Said that we are dealing with tough regime, the society is seized with fear and parents should try to protect their children.

After it started, as is said, daily routine. For example we got to know what and how we could send to children. Everywhere they have their own rules – limited, stupid. But we had to get used to them. All our family was in the situation as if one of its members went to war. We wanted to make Tsimafei's life easier, to make him feel that we care about him, that we are close to him.

In two weeks I met with lawyer Paval Sapelka. Came to Melezha 4 where he worked. I had to talk about the possibility of changing restraint measure to home arrest. One of the arguments for it was that his wife was on the 8^{th} month of pregnancy. I thought that on that stage of investigation we could do something. But Paval said more negative than positive. I felt no optimism in his words, he was speaking very carefully, charily. I didn't feel that he wanted to fight. And to my mind the field for fight was very large. And the result – 5 months of investigation I think was the failure of lawyers.

Almost every day we wrote letters to Tsimafei. It was a kind of our parental duty. Me and wife wrote two letters and put them in one envelope and sent. We tried to give him moral support. Each one of us did it in a different way. Not everything we wanted we could write by plain text. For me it was important to say that our way to independence sometimes lies through prison. Tsimafei always understood me and tried to write back in the same way.

Excerpts from his letters were later published by "Narodnaia Volia". After it many people called me and told that they were touched by it.

I prepared a present for Tsimafei – my book of ecological didactics "Kazhu Dzetiam". I dedicated it to Platon, my first grandchild, whose father hadn't seen him yet. I sent the book to Kalvaryiskaia prison, where Tsimafei was serving his term. It was very pleasant to read in letters that the book was read there by many people who found in it many interesting thing.

Of course almost every day worked our so-called "Support Group". We, parents, all the time kept contact. Gathered at some places. Sometimes gave interviews, got acquainted with representatives of different civic organizations. We gave information to different press services, took part in actions of protest. Journalists also helped us till the last day of Tsimafei's imprisonment. The case of "Partnership" was not the common one, after the disappearance of political opponents of the regime it again showed all the depth of moral fall of Belarusian regime.
I wrote about it in several days after my son's arrest to Rushaila, because CIS and Russia were the main observers at the elections. And Rushaila was the head of the delegation. I brought the letter to the headquarters of CIS and gave it to them with all necessary proceedings. Belarusian citizen, working in CIS structure Iaugen Slabada said that Rushaila wasn't in Minsk at that time and they would send the letter to Moscow by fax. The respond to my letter came from Asan Kazhakou (if I am not mistaken it is one of the Rushaila's deputies). He repeated me exactly the same I already had heard in the prosecutor's office in Minsk. But my letter gave me grounds to make a conclusion that the cases of "Partnership" as the election of Lukashenka to the third term were the joint operations of KGB and FSB. And today I'm sure in it even more, especially when I see what is happening in Russia before the presidential elections.
— Remind please, what was happening during the process.
— The court of Central district was across the road from Suvorau Military School, now it moved to the former building of the lyceum. For me the best of all in the process was the fact that all time I could see near the court building a lot of wonderful people — human rights defenders, representatives of foreign embassies, journalists, activists from regions. The closed hearing continued six days. And every day even under pouring rain there were lots of people. That was a good manifestation of solidarity. Among those who were supporting our children I want especially mention Valery Schukin. I had a nice creative tandem with him. Every day he prepared the chronicle of the process sent it to me and I prepared the newspaper. A kind of samizdat called "Skariny Avenu" and words "...will be ours!" As you know, not long before that the authorities had changed the name of the mane avenue of the capital.
Of course with time passing I can't remember some details. During that year I had lots of meeting with different people. Many times I

was at Prosecutor State's Office, at Constitutional Court, at different parliamentary commissions, international representatives. I was looking for people who could help political prisoners, especially at the stage of investigation. And here is one thing I can't understand till now. People said that it was a political case and no one could do anything but for one person. As if till Lukashenka would say what to do no one would do anything to take responsibility. That's why there was no sense to do anything, to ask for help. They told it about state structures, different officials. I understood what all these people were talking about, because I myself am not a person who likes to beg for anything. But I went there not to beg and that's the great difference. I went there to find justice, to make people do their constitutional duties. I appealed to definite Articles of Constitution and Law. Sometimes the atmosphere during such meetings was very tense. It happened that before I left the office I told the official sitting in the chair: "Remember it, you state scoundrel!" But sometimes we said "good bye", and shook hands. But to do something is always better than to sit and to wait. The officials understood that it's not just a parent standing before them, but a citizen of the country. It was important for me to take a look in their eyes. From one side I felt their compassion from the other one — statement of authoritarianism. And this is the only way how our country can defend its citizens today. But it was better, because I had a moral right to write a complaint to UN Human Rights Committee. Better because there are still people possessing conscience and they can help in scope of their possibilities. I can't say that it influenced something in our case but Tsimafei spent behind the bars two months less than he had to according to the sentence.

I think that the best moral support for you during Tsimafei's imprisonment was the birth of Platon.

That was the greatest joy and drama for our family. Me but not his father took Platon from maternity hospital. And I had one more duty — to free my son so that he could see Platon and take him in his hands. But at that moment no one thought about it. May be it would sound a bit odd, but there is some immaturity — to see only those things which lay on the surface. But no one paid attention that an infant was growing without his father, and his father at the moment was in pre-trial prison for acting on behalf of unregistered organization. It's weird, but no one saw a drama in the situation. Sometimes I told: there is a political prisoner, his

three-month old son he hadn't held on his hands. Take lawyer, sociologist, political scientist — there are ministries, legal institutes, international representatives, you can give publicity to this situation.
It's a pity but there were some mistakes...
Of course, politics should be seen everywhere, because it is everywhere. Especially when authoritarian despotic regime is governing the country. It's a pity but very often our people can't look deeper into the problem.
— When did you see Tsimafei for the first time after his arrest?
— First visit was given to Volha. Right after the birth of Platon in April. Before that I tried to get a visit, but they all the time refused explaining it by "investigation interest". And where are my interests — father's? But when Platon was born those letters fulfilled their assignment. Volha was given a visit not taking into account any "interests"
I continued to ask for visit for a long time. Several times I was at appointment with important official of our country, cut the red tape. I've read all the legal literature Tsimafei had left. When I got the third refuse marked "investigation interest" I wrote to general and city prosecutors about my indignation and protest. I wrote that this was a planned action of humiliation against prisoners and their relatives, which contradicts international norms and regulations and can be called — torture. One of my arguments was my grandson Platon.
I sent the text to Belarusian department of "Svaboda" in Prague which reacted immediately. In an hour Alena Tikhanovich called me to take an interview. And at 18.00 my claim was the main news on the web-site. "Svaboda" was monitoring the situation about "Partnership" all the time.
I got the permission to visit my son only in June. It was a hot sunny day. I was overfilled with emotions. I hadn't seen my son four months. He came through the same doors I did right after me. We were given the possibility to hug. It depends on the guard, some of them allow to do it some doesn't. We understood that not everything could be said. But managed to discuss almost everything. We were taking through the glass. In the beginning I thanked him for courage and congratulated with his son's birth. And later our conversation continued our correspondence, which as I have already mentioned was almost daily.
I saw him two more times before the trial. When the judge was appointed only he could give the permission to visits. And he was rather loyal, having known that soon all his loyalty would finish and the sentences would be tough. Especially for Tsimafei and Mikalay.

— Tsimafei wasn't transferred to colony after the trial...

— No, he was left in Minsk, in Kalvariyskaia prison. Of course he had no choice and we were prepared to everything — Shklou, Magileu. Were afraid of "Vouch'i Nory" somewhere in Brest area. Twice I went to the department of corrections. The main problem was to get inside and then people who worked there understood the worries of a father. I consulted former political prisoners — Valery Levaneuski, Aliaksandar Vasil'eu.

The fact that Tsimafei stayed in Minsk is at the same time good and bad. Closer to home, but the regime is tougher here. If Tsimafei got to some regional correctional institution may be he would come back home a month earlier. But it's difficult to say. A lot depends on circumstances, conditions, people. In every such institution there is a so-called "review board" which also takes part in decision-making about the release on parole. It consists of representatives of local authorities and community. And in Kalvaryiskaia prison this function is done by the administration of Frunzensky district. I decided to write them a letter. But no one even took it. To register — no, they didn't need additional problems. I remember a young man, jurist of the commission, a little bit older than Tsimafei. He had even heard something about "Partnership" case. He read my letter, listened to me and promised to read it during the session of the commission. And later Tsimafei told me that that person had really done it. He also added: this young man wants to raise his child, we have to trust him and to help. It is one of the best memories of Tsimafei from that time — about the person, who wanted to help the political prisoner. The week before I visited the prison warden. He didn't exclude Tsimafei's release on parole and I was given hope. And then I asked that if it was possible to release him before Christmas, because on the 25th of December his grandmother had her anniversary — 80 years. It would be the best present for her. "You demand a lot" he answered. Tsimafei stayed there all holiday and was released in the morning on the 26th of December.

AUTHOR'S COMMENT.

This is the case when the parent is as well-known as the child.

The difference is that one of them is involved in politics and the other one in solving ecological problems.

But... Please, forgive me this mistake. In our country everyone is a politician. Even the ecologist.



FROM THE BOOK "WOMEN"

IRYNA HRUSHAVAYA



Prepared for publication on 09.05.2007

I deliberately avoided asking her about Chernobyl programmes. This is too extensive a subject, which Iryna Hrushavaya and her husband Hienadz have been engaged in for about 20 years already — more than anyone else in this country. They have arranged for over half a million children to improve their health abroad. It is no exaggeration to say that her charitable nature has become one of her distinguishing features. This interview reveals how it happened and why.

— I was born on 1 September 1948 in Simferopol, the Crimea. My use it means "peace”. I have a sister, Ludmila by name, who was born in 1943 in Siberia, where my father Lev Michailovich was being treated in hospital after a serious injury he had suffered in the first days of war. Our family history is typical of the 20th century, when people were uprooted and carried from one place to another for about a hundred years. My mother’s name is Clara. Her family came from the suburbs of Riga. In the early 20th century Stolypin’s reform made the whole settlement move to Siberia, Bolsheuluyski district of Kemerovo region. The living conditions were very poor, the climate was different from what they were used to. The town was renamed Stalinsk, then Kemerovo again. My mother was born in Kemerovo and my sister was born in Stalinsk, though it is in fact just the same town. There was a whole Latvian village called Kandata in the suburbs of Kemerovo. The elder family members used to speak Latvian at home, but we were not taught the language except a couple of words and two songs, which I cannot help regretting. Perhaps that is why I have always wanted to understand and speak other languages. By the way, before the war

my mum had suffered Stalin's repression, as she was the daughter of the people's enemy. Her father had been sent to a prison camp and executed for beeing a Latvian. So had her stepfather. My mum told me that Soviet repressive police officers had been searching Latvian households for some riches, though they had hardly made ends meet. She forever remembered stealing some flour from her Grandad, mixing it with water and sticking the flat cake to the stove. Even as her time was drawing near she said she had never tasted anything more delicious in all her life. Later on she lived in the Crimea, were wheat and rye hardly grew at all. Every time she arrived in Minsk, she would tear apart a chunk of bread and take in the smell. If you want to understand what the famine in Ukraine was all about, just try to picture this. She treated bread as the most sacred deli.

As for my father, he was born in Belarus, near Kalinkavichy. His father, a communist activist, was shot by the White Guard in 1918. His seven children were orphaned. My dad was sent to an orphanage and somehow found himself in the Crimea, where he grew up in the company of other kids. I remember a friend of my father's very well. His name was Nickolay Mokrousov. By some coincidence, their orphanage was situated in Mokrousov Street. After the orphanage, my dad and Nickolay Mokrousov were assigned to Leningrad River College. Romantic natures, they did not want to sail rivers, so they went much farther, to Murmansk, and got jobs on a trawler. My father was a fisherman in the Barents Sea for four years. He had lost all connections with his family and restored them only much later.

Six months before the war broke out, my father was called up. For a few months the soldiers were transferred to Belarus, to the western frontier of the USSR. When the war began, my father was in Brest. The troops were making a fighting retreat. My father got a Courage Medal, a rare case of an officer receiving a soldier's award. In October he was wounded in the chest. The ground was covered in snow. The bullet passed his lung and got stuck in his mediastinum, so he was dispatched to hospital in the rear. When the war broke out, my mum graduated from medical college and was dreaming of becoming a teacher. But, being the daughter of the people's enemy, she was banned from going to university. She was dispatched to the front line, but on the way there the whole group was ordered to go to work in the hospital in Kemerovo region. This was where my dad met my mum.

The doctors decided against removing the bullet. "If you want to live, live with the bullet in your chest”, said the professor who had arrived to operate on him. My father lived with it for another thirty years but eventually it was the bullet that killed him. It got encapsulated and was moving a bit, clearly visible in all X-rays. When the medical science was advanced enough to remove it, the operation was out of the question, as my father had suffered two heart attacks and would not have survived the anaesthesia. For eleven years he was bedridden. Every day of his life was a gift from my mother. She worked as a nurse all her life, both in the menigitis ward in the hospital and at home. When the war was over, my parents moved to the Crimea, as the climate there was more favourable for my father than in Siberia. He was a communist believer.

— What does it mean?

— He believed in communist ideals and was absolutely impractical. Now I understand it was because he had spent his childhood in an orphanage. My Granny kept accusing him of not knowing the ways of the world. We lived in a slum on the outskirts of Simferopol, five people in a twelve-metre room, in horrible conditions, while a lot of good stone houses were being built in the neighbourhood. Being a war veteran, my father asked the local military committee to help him with accommodation. He was told to find an abandoned house, which were plenty after the war. But each time he found a place to live, someone else moved in before we did. It was him who found the accommodation, which then went to other people, who were more cunning and had the right connections. My father was an open-hearted, sincere and honest person, whereas a lot of people around us followed quite different rules. I may have taken after him in some ways. When I was about thirteen, I organised a group of girls from my class into a kind of Girl Guides team. We found a helpless old painter, who was living out his life with his wife, and took care of them. We ploughed the soil in his vegetable garden, I used to read him books. So the desire to help other people was rooted in my soul. I remember the slogans on my desk, "If you are having a hard time, help someone else" and "Man, assist yourself by yourself!" These maxims have been with me throughout my life. I must admit I do not always manage to assist myself all by myself. Then friends and family come to my rescue. Then you understand that charity is like a relay-race baton, which you have to pass on to others.

Gratitude fills you with energy of love, which you have to pass on, too, so that the people around you are lit with the same fire. I have met a lot of such "fiery" people. I was strongly opposed to the teaching profession, but I became a teacher eventually, after I graduated from Minsk Linguistic University.

— Why didn't you go to Crimean Linguistic University?

— By the way, it was a few hundred metres from home. I chose Minsk both by chance and by predestination. I did well at school. Two years before I finished school, I joined a movement within the Young Communist League, which opposed the Komsomol's bureaucratic practices. It was in a way an echo of the youth movements in the West, which aspired to change the stale old social models for something more modern and flexible. In 1968 this led to profound democratic transformations in the West European countries. As for the Soviet Union, Khrushchev's thaw facilitated the emergence of young communard teams throughout the country.

Our team consisted of senior school students and had a motto, "Our aim is people's happiness. We will prevail, there is no other way!" We were full of communist romanticism and acted out of our own will, without the adults" directions. In 1962 the Headmaster among other things allowed us to meet in the basement. We painted crimson sails on all the walls and used to sing songs to the guitar, dreaming about our future. We also indulged in practical activities. For instance, we carried out a campaign "Making People Happy". Thus, having made an arrangement with some kindergarten, we came there at night to make snowmen, which, of course, was a pleasant surprise for the kids in the morning. We appeared in amateur concerts for young soldiers in the hospital and went to Zuya village, which was 18 kilmetres from Simferopol to work in the vineyards. We organised it all by ourselves. Nowadays it seems unthinkable for schoolchildren in Belarus to do anything without teachers" directions.

Our team lasted for two years, right until Brezhnev's stagnation began. When I was finishing school, the team had ceased to exist. In my final year at school I fell ill with some strange disease, which no doctor was able to diagnose. At the age of sixteen I had constant splitting headaches twenty-four hours a day. I was taken to hospital, then moved to another one. My friends came to visit me, I was trying to study. I had my tonsils removed, but the headache did not get any

better. It seemed to be green in colour. The whole year was marked by my disease. When I was once again sent back home from hospital, the doctors wrote without thinking much that I had brain dropsy. I read in the medical encyclopaedia that the maximal lifespan for a person suffering from this disease was eighteen years. But I did not feel any mortal terror. Being a very wise woman, my mum took everything in a calm manner. For example, I used to be very small as a child and was not growing at all. My mum even thought I was lilliputian, but she would not consult doctors or make me take any hormones. This lasted till I was in my 8th year at school, and then I suddenly grew by 20 cm within one summer. At present I am just about medium height. My mother approached that horrible diagnosis in the same calm way and just threw away the medical papers. Whether such a model is correct is open to discussion, but it certainly worked in my case.

The doctors ruled that I should not do any mental work and, consequently, apply to university. I received my school-leaving certificate without doing exams. Of course, the doors of all the universities in our region were closed to me. I wanted to become a psychologist, but there were only two psychology departments in all the USSR, in Moscow and Leningrad (now St.Petersburg), so the competition there was pretty fierce. I decided not to take the risk but become a student all the same, even if I had only a few years to live. That year future psychologists were supposed to take exams in maths, physics and chemistry, which were not my strong points. I was good at German and happened to watch a programme about Minsk Linguistic University on TV. Having a romantic nature, I decided to apply there, in spite of the fact that our regional linguistic university was just a few minutes" walk from home.

My parents deserve the highest praise for allowing me to go to university a thousand miles away from home, even though I was seriously ill. I am not sure if I could do the same. I arrived in Minsk with my sister. The headaches became so acute that I just couldn’t read, so my sister read to me, and I took notes. At the exams I got the grades which allowed admission to some applicants, but not all of them. That year both eleven-formers and ten-formers had left school and were going to universities, so there were twice as many applicants as usual. Naturally, such an unpleasant coincidence increased the competition. Having come from another republic, I was the first to be

denied admission. Then my father, who was already bedridden at the time, wrote a letter to the First Secretary of the Belarusian Communist Party Piotr Masherau, in which he stressed that he had been wounded while fighting for Belarus. In the end I was permitted to attend classes and following the first examination session I became a student. Of course, I was not given a place in the students" hall of residence and did not receive a scholarship. At first I lived at the railway station, where a policeman at night used to make sure that nobody should stay there overnight. On my third day at university I broke down and burst into tears in class. When my fellow students found out the reason, they offered to hide me in their hall of residence, where I could dwell in secret, sleeping on a camp bed. In this way I understood what female solidarity meant. A few months later I was officially allowed to dwell in the hall of residence. In Belarus my splitting headaches disappeared, never to come back again. It may have been some kind of allergy...

— How did you meet your husband Hienadz Hrushavy?

— It was destiny. He was studying in his final year at the department of philosophy of the Belarusian State University. My friends referred to him as a handsome young man with his vision blurred by philosophy. He was the youngest among his fellow students, the only one who had been admitted to university without any working experience, which was a must at their department. Now I understand that he was so convincing that the admission board couldn't but give in. I had just graduated with a first class degree at the time and was offered a position at the German department of my university. When the New Year was setting in, the girls from my room in the hall of residence wanted to have a celebration in boys" company but had no close friends. I was indifferent to their idea, but at that moment my charity genes kicked in. So I went to some acquaintances of mine from the Belarusian State University hall of residence to find company for my friends. Some young men were willing to join in the party. One of them said he would bring a friend with him. It turned out to be Hienadz. Unlike the others, who climbed up the fire-escape to the third floor, he somehow managed to talk the strict guard into letting him in. We shared the chair and the plate. It was destiny.

We got married in 1972. The next year Maryna was born, then five years later we had a son, Maxim by name. I cannot escape an enormous sense of guilt, since my children grew up neglected by their parents.

This is what causes me the deepest sufferings. The reason is we had a "big child" named Chernobyl, which in a way stole us from our children. It was not my deliberate choice, I couldn't escape the feeling that it had been decided for us.

— Perhaps this is what makes you happy…

— Not in the least.

Happiness is a feature of character. It cannot emerge from anywhere but it comes from inside. I think I am a very happy person and I must work hard to help others be happy, too. I paid a high price to learn to be happy. I know that happiness is not some syrup or a sweet cake. It is some unknown energy that gives you strength and motivation, making you keep going. Even if you stop feeling it, you know for sure that it exists and try to experience it again. We all have happiness inside us. It can grow in favourable conditions, like a seed. Sometimes it is just a gulp of water. For a bird happiness means flying in the sky. For a mole it means digging underground. For me happiness is a reservoire of energy, where you can be charged with energy and share your own energy with others.

ANTANINA KAVALIOVA



Recorded on 17.10.2006

Antanina Kavaliova went into politics not because she wanted to. In fact, she was made to protest. Our conversation throws some light on how and why it happened.

— It is not an interrogation, but could you tell me when and where you were born, please?

— On 12 April 1959 in Okuneúka village of Shkloú district, Mahiloú region. So in a sense I come from the same place as President Lukashenka. I was born on Cosmonauts" Day into the family of village dwellers. I was the youngest of five children. My father Klimienty Siamionavich worked on a collective farm (*sovkhoz*) and my mother Taciana Ivanaúna was a housewife.

My eldest brother Anatol was 20 years older than me. He died in a car accident. I have two other brothers, Uladzimir and Leanid by names, and a sister called Ludmila.

I keep thinking about my childhood as one of the most wonderful episodes in my life. It seemed to me that I was loved by everyone and I loved everyone, too. I started school in Okuneúka. I was eager to begin studying. As a rule children went to school at the age of seven, but I learnt to read when I was five, if not earlier. I loved to be read to and asked everybody to read me a story. They did not say "no" but advised me to learn to read by myself. I had a good memory and knew a lot of poems by heart, so it was not difficult to learn to read. I learnt my ABC from newspaper headlines. I took *Sovetskaya Belorussia* paper with an article *Thank You, Engineer* and kept asking everyone which letter was this or that. Then came other articles. In my mind I have a very clear

picture of an early morning, a hot stove and myself sitting by the window and reading letter by letter, "P-E-O-P-L-E I-N T-H-E M-A-R-S-H-E-S[2]".
Someone heard me and said, "Look, she can already read!" I remember that my second book was *The Three Musketeers* by Dumas. Having learnt the letters from newspaper headlines, I had some difficulty recognising them in book fonts. For example, I had never come across a lower case "b", since the headlines always had a capital "B". I did not understand the abbreviation "*M-me*" until someone explained to me that it stood for "*Madame*".
The countryside around our village was very beautiful but the forest was a bit far away. My
father and I went to pick up mushrooms there. I liked him to take me with him wherever he went, say, to cut firewood or to pasture the cattle. He told me a lot of interesting stories. He had been born into a big family and had eight brothers and a sister. His brothers had moved to Moscow but my father had chosen to live in the country.
I started school twice, actually. The first time was at the age of six. I came into the classroom, took a seat at the desk and began reading something. A few minutes later the headmaster appeared and said, "Sorry, I cannot accept you, please, come next year". Of course the second attempt was more successful. The reason I wanted to go to school a year earlier was that my friend, who was a year older than me and also called Antanina, was admitted to school, so I wanted to be in the same class with her.
I did very well at school. We only had a basic eight-grade school at our village, so for two years I had to go on foot 5 kilometres every day to a nearby village that had a high school. But I was not awarded a gold medal, having got a B for an essay. The subject was about the role of communists in some process (I no longer remember which exactly). My essay was based on *The Virgin Land* by Sholokhov. I made a spelling mistake in the phrase "a party group".
After I finished school I went to Minsk to apply to the law department of the Belarusian State University.
— Why did you choose law?
— Although I had excellent grades in sciences, I was inclined towards the humanities. By the way, I had been left-handed before I went to school, where I was taught to write with the right hand. When at primary

[2] The title of a major work by Ivan Mielezh, a classic of Belarusian literature.

school, I used to write with the left hand at home and with the right one in the classroom. Everybody knows that left-handed people have a bit different brain structure, the right hemisphere being the leading one. It is responsible for imagination, languages and arts. So I wanted to choose a department where I did not have to take an exam in maths. I hesitated between the law and history departments. My elder brother Uladzimir, who lived in Minsk and worked for the Nuclear Energy R&D Institute, advised me to take up law. The competition was enormous, it was a general practice to admit mainly those applicants who had already got some working experience or graduated from the preparatory department. I thought it was a good opportunity to check if I was really a top student or they had to make allowances for my rural schooling.

Just like at school, I had no difficulties studying at the law department, even though I was not a top student at university. To tell the truth, I couldn’t resist the "city’s temptations", I wanted to go to concerts and to the theatre. But I needed a scholarship, so I had to make quite good grades. By then my brother Leanid after doing his military service had gone to university, too, so there were two students in our family, which put additional strain on the family budget. I sometimes took odd jobs, sorting the mail at the main railway post office. I did not want to be a top student, having had enough of it at school. The thing was that those who made excellent grades only were entitled with all kinds of Komsomol duties, which I found a burden. I did not want any of that because in many respects it was meaningless.

By the way, when I was 14 I was forced to join the Young Communists" League against my will. I was considered a dissident in our village. I listened to *The Voice of America*, which was jammed. My father told me about Stalin’s repression and Stalin. Actually, I first heard the name before I went to school. My aunt Varvara, who was a common village dweller, heard me reading aloud some old songbook. When I asked her who Stalin was, she said, "A villain. He used to butcher people". Later on, my father told me about the Belomorcanal, where one of his brothers had been working as a gulag inmate. But at the age of 14 I had to give up my principles because my brother Uladzimir had explained to me that I wouldn’t be able to go on studying without joining the Komsomol. The only thing I liked about Komsomol activities was a kind of quiz show team. We went to the district centre to compete with other teams, where I believe I contributed something to our school team taking the second place.

After graduating from university I was sent to work at Shkloú Notary Office, but I did not stay there long, because my husband had a job in Minsk. Having moved to the capital, I worked at Pieršamajski District Notary Office, then got a position at the city notary office. In 1989 I decided to try my hand at private legal service, so I went to work for a lawyers" firm. It was very different from being a notary. It may sound unbelievable nowadays, but we won a case in which our client claimed compensation from the factory administration. His pension was considerably raised, which we regarded as our major victory. Right then I got a call from the Ministry of Justice. Their chief notary officer had just retired, so they offered the position to me.

I remember Deputy Minister of Justice Loúchy praising my strengths at a meeting and asking me if I intended to join the Communist Party. I replied I did not need to belong to the party to build on my strengths. From that moment the ministry officials came to consider me an "opposition member.'

I resigned from the Ministry of Justice in 1992, just about the time the decision on private notaries was adopted. I was the first to apply for a license and the fifth to be registered as a private notary. I worked till 1 February 1999.

— And then private notaries were faced with the notorious Plaskavicki's legislation...

— On 1 February 1999 my license expired. I was denied a new one under the pretext that my "outlook was not broad enough". I do not think Plaskavicki, who was then the Head of the Chief State Legal Office of the President's Administration, was the only problem. But it was originally his initiative. He was said to have a grudge against private notaries. Rumours began circulating about their enormous incomes. It led to the presidential decree on certain measures to improve lawyers" and notaries" functioning in the Republic of Belarus of 3 May 1997, which strictly limited our income. We were obliged to pay about 80 per cent of our revenues to the state budget at once, covering the costs and calculating the income from the remaining sum. This lasted for a year before we were made to pay retroactively everything we allegedly had not paid for the previous five years. In each case the decision was made by a special commision, which determined how much was to be paid in the absence of the notaries themselves. It was absurd.

I did not agree to pay the sum had arbitrarily figured out. Then they took me to court. The ruling they required was passed on 3 December 1998 by a person "temporarily substituting for the judge", who was appointed judge by the presidential decree only on 14 December. In fact the decision was passed by somebody who was not in a position to do that.

Late in January 1999 my appeal was rejected and a few days later I was denied a license. Someone must have thought I had been complaining too much. True, I had used all available means of legal protection, even though I understood it must have been considered naive, to put it mildly. Although the money issue was quite important, it was not the main reason that made me act. I was shocked and outraged at the government's perfidy. After all, every person should have their dignity.

— What does happiness mean to you?

— Happiness is those volatile moments when a person feels a special exhilaration and lives in harmony with the universe. There are other feelings and emotions, such as pleasure, joy, inspiration, etc. that can make you happy. My life is far from being over, so I cannot decide if it has been successful or not.

From an ordinary philistine perspective I may be considered a loser. After all, I have no job, my career is ruined and I have lost a lot in professional terms. But when I say that I am all right I do mean it. It is my creed that you can only be happy if you live in harmony with yourself. For example, being a lawyer by profession, I could easily be a judge — in theory. But I cannot imagine myself sending a young man or a girl to prison just because they have dared to air their opinion of the current regime; and then coming home and peacefully cooking dinner for my children, who may be peers of those I have just incarcerated. Thanks God, I do not have to give up on my principles or act against my conscience.

— So I understand it was not you who went into politics. Rather, politics came to you.

— I do not think of myself as a politician. I have never been engaged in politics. It is just that all my life I have been a dissident, always belonging to the minority.

Sometimes I think when the present opponents of the regime gain power, I will automatically find myself in opposition. That's the way I'm made.

GALINA SIAMDZIANAVA



Recorded on 26.04.2007

The picture of Galina Siamdzianava with one of Belarus's communist bosses when the Supreme Soviet was banning the Communist Party was nearly as popular as the well-known photo of Belarusian Prime Minister Viachaslau Kiebich kissing Viktor Chernomyrdin. At present, however, Galina Siamdzianava seems to be staying in the shadow. This is what we began our conversation with.

— Is it true that you have given up the leading roles in politics?

— Well, we can look at it from a different perspective, can't we? You have been a political journalist for over a decade, but this is the first time you have interviewed me. Why should you do so, if I were no longer a political figure?

When I was a member of parliament and Deputy Head of the Belarusian People's Front (BPF) Party, I did not enjoy much of journalists" attention. However, now that I am just an ordinary member of the BPF Party Sojm, things have changed, your colleagues calling me regularly to ask for my opinion. So in a way you have asked a rhetorical question.

In fact, I know my worth, and so do others. When there is something out of the ordinary happening in the BPF, the party leaders often come to me for advice. It is not actually the first time I have found myself in the shadow. In 1996, when I was no longer an MP, I began working for the Supreme Soviet Secretariat and could not be engaged in party actvities, since the law forbade that. When Lukashenka dismissed the Supreme Soviet in early 1997, its speaker Siamion Sharetski offered me a job at the secretariat of the shadowy Supreme Soviet. Hardly anyone knew about that.

— Most people contacted Valancina Sviackaja and did not really know about you.

— She was my boss.

— Soon the BPF split up, didn't it?

— That's true. It happened in 1999. When faced with the choice between the Conservative Christian Party BPF and the BPF Party, I chose the latter.

— Why did you do so?

— What the CCP — BPF has been doing, if it still exists, looks like petty intrigues, something really small-minded. It is not the way to do politics. I have had a deep respect towards the CCP — BPF leader Zianon Pazniak since we worked together in parliament. As the leader of the parliamentary opposition, he taught us a lot. However, I have lost all interest in him as a politician since he emigrated. I do not blame him, but I have no intention to make him a cult figure. Zianon Pazniak may be doing something useful, but I would rather he had taken a different course of action.

He is the leader of the CCP — BPF. I believe that those people who have carried out his ideas have been mistaken. I do not approve of their practices.

Things look much better in our party. It is an open and democratic organisation. We have one of the best opposition leaders at the head. That is why I have chosen the BPF Party.

When we were undergoing the registration procedure with the Ministry of Justice, I used to go there every day for six months, as if it had been my workplace. The ministry officials ran a thorough check on us, looking into every detail, but in the end our party was registered. Then the CCP — BPF went to court to demand our liquidation. It took us a lot of time and effort, but eventually we won the case. Our aim was not to crush our opponents but to protect ourselves.

— So it was actually not only the regime but also your former associates who gave you a hard time, wasn't it?

— Unfortunately, that was the fact. The split-up has made us stonger, in my opinion. We have turned into a more democratic organisation and a better educated one, too. Today almost all of our party leaders have a university degree. Things used to be different. There were all kinds of people among BPF supporters before it became a party, including those with mental problems or just having a grudge against

the government. They thought the BPF would certainly take their side. By the way, sometimes the government can have good reasons for persecuting a person, for example if they have committed a crime. To my great regret, that was the case with some people who joined the BPF movement. We had to look thoroughly into the matter and if some of our members were wrong, we openly told them so.

Anybody could belong to the BPF movement, but it is different with the party. Although we are open to everyone, we have to be selective. Besides, there is such a thing as party discipline.

— When and where were you born?

— On 28 February 1947 in Gdynia. Both my parents were war veterans. My mother Alena had worked as a senior surgical nurse at a hospital. My father Hieorhij had fought in the war on motor torpedo-boats, then taught at naval schools. Our family often moved from one city to another: Berlin, Liepae, St.Petersburg, Astrakhan, Batumi and Kiev. I was brought up by my stepfather Jakaú Ivanavich, who was an airforce pilot. His plane had been shot down in the war and he had been badly wounded. The doctors were going to transfer him to the reverve, but after spending a lot of time in hospital he was able to pass the fitness tests and went on flying planes. He eventually retired as Air Chief Marshal and division commander. He deserves the highest praise, having always been for me a role model and an impersonation of decency, common sense and kindness. I never felt I was not his own child. He loved and respected me, which was really important to me. Till his very last days we were on absolutely unique terms. Of course, you cannot ignore the genes, but it was in the first place my stepfather who developed all my positive features. He never preached to me on how to behave. It was just that his ideas and actions had a strong impact on me. Any excessive liberty was out of the question, but I had known since childhood that my opinion mattered, as if I had been an adult. I do not like being pressed to do something. It only leads to quite an opposite effect.

I have three sisters. Viktoryja, the eldest, lives in Moscow, Lilija, who is younger than me, is in Kiev and my youngest sister Maryna lives in Alushta.

Our parents gave us plenty of their time, reading aloud (we actually heard the whole of Jules Verne), taking us to the forest, to the cinema or theatre, going fishing with us, visiting all kinds of exhibitions and

going on excursions. They taught us a lot of practical skills, which turned out very useful. I can sew, knit, fix water taps, paint surfaces, use a saw, etc. I can do everything but make footwear.
Upon finishing school I was awarded a gold medal and went to study at Kuybyshev Polytechnical University.

— It is more typical of women to choose medicine or teaching as a career. Why did you go to polytechnic?

— I have a "technical" mind. Besides, it is our family tradition. My grandad on my father's side, Sciapan by name, was a torpedo-man. By the way, he had been on board of the *Ochakov* with Lieutenant Schmidt when the sailors began their uprising. Later on he was exiled to Kharkiv as a political suspect. He had a very calm character, whereas his wife and my granny Nastaśsia Ściapanaúna was very energetic and vigorous.
My father took in his father's footsteps and went to sea. But his brother Viktar went to study explosives. He graduated from Leningrad Technological University, got his doctor's degree and became a prominent scientist in his field. During the war uncle Viktar worked in the besieged Leningrad. Later on he organised a research department in Kuybyshev Polytechnical University and even worked as its principal for a few years.

— So you had to work with iron, didn't you?

— It wasn't iron but chemistry. Explosives, to be more precise. It is considered to be the wrong profession for a woman, but I liked it. I enjoyed my work and I even have some patents for inventions. Apart from ammunition, we supervised absolutely peaceful explosions, too.
— And of course you also had some private life.
— That's true. My ex-husband Barys Siamdzianau was called up after he graduated from aircraft university. He decided to stay in the army, so we had to travel a lot all over the former Soviet Union. We have two children, Dzmitry and Julia. There is a big age gap between them. Now they are both adults with university degrees, both having families of their own.
By the way, one of the reasons I am less involved in politics nowadays is my grandson, who is about four. Being a granny is a full-time job, actually.
I came to live in Belarus from Perm, Russia.

— What made you choose Belarus?

— Well, my parents and I lived in Baranavichy in the 1960s. I remember when Jury Gagarin flew into space, we frolicked around, shouting

"Hooray!" I had lived in many places since then, but none of them had been that comfortable, nowhere had I felt at home. It may seem strange but even Ukraine, where I had been coming to visit my grandparents, never felt like Belarus. I like visiting Ukraine, but I belong here.

— Could you tell me how you were elected to parliament and joined the BPF?

— I came to live in Navahradak at the beginning of January 1983 and worked there for seven years before I became an MP. It is difficult to get a job in a small district centre. First I worked as a standardisation engineer at the metal plant, then as an agricultural chemistry specialist at the local Agricultural Chemistry Department, where I also was the head of the communist party group.

Then I became an inspector of the people's controlling committee. In general there are law enforcement bodies to do this job, so I doubted whether the controlling committee was really necessary. It used to detect illegal practices and pass on the documents to the prosecutor's office. Although such practices were rather widespread, the prosecutors only started a case if they got a phone call from the town's party committee. I understood that something was wrong with the system. I never give up on my principles and people who know me say I am an honest person. It was a time when all cosumer goods were in short supply. I used to check up shops, warehouses, etc., but I never ever abused my position to get the goods I needed, no matter how badly my family wanted them. All the town knew it, so when the election campaign began in 1990, the district civil servants" union registered me as their candidate. The town's party committee immediately registered an alternative candidate to oppose me, who was the head of the pediatric wing at the local hospital. All in all, there were eight candidates standing for parliament in our constituency. At first there were some doubts if I would be registered, but bus service employees held a meeting to appoint me as their candidate, so it was just impossible to deny me registration. Of course, the authorities tried to give me a hard time, but they couldn't block my election.

It seems strange that the party officials were so much opposed to me, because I was a communist party member at the time and even belonged to the town's party committee, so it would have been logical if the communist party had supported me as their candidate. I hated the BPF at the time, taking it for a kind of fascist organisation. In fact,

I believed every rumour the official propaganda spread. There was no BPF group in Navahradak, so I imagined the BPF as some horrible monster and couldn't understand why the town's party officials thought I would join the BPF. When I first saw Zianon Pazniak in parliament, he only confirmed me in my negative attitude. However, a few days of communication with the BPF members were enough for me to realise that they aired the same views as I did and Zianon Pazniak was far from a monster.

This experience gave me food for thought. I wondered if the information we got from the official media was reliable. A few weeks later I understood that everything state-owned media fed to us was a lie. At the time a group of like-minded MPs came into being, which eventually formed the basis of the BPF faction. I joined it even though I was not a BPF member at first. Then I began attending the BPF Sojm meetings and realised that the government was telling lies about the BPF. Things have not changed since then, the propaganda machine still functioning and brainwashing the population.

Being MPs, we travelled a lot around the country, meeting people. The meetings were attended by BPF supporters and enemies alike. After a few hours" discussions a lot of our opponents said the BPF appeared to be totally different from what they had been told.

I left the Communist Party in 1990, having paid all the membership dues. I am not ashamed of what I had been doing as a party member, but it makes me sad that I once believed in its honesty and decency.

As for the BPF, it would be wrong to say it reflects some far-fetched abstract ideas, which do not matter to the general public. The BPF is a kind of organisation that advocates everybody's opinions, especially those of common people, who make over 80 per cent of the BPF members, rather than some refined intellectuals. It is really the **people's** front. There are representatives of all social stratas in the BPF, ranging from academics to stablemen, education being not the most important criterion.

I am lucky to have met a lot of interesting people. Sometimes couldn't help being astonished by the old, who were over seventy in the 1990s. Many of them must have died by now. Probably due to their life experience and wisdom they were people of great insight. The young call them "advanced ones". However, those who were some 20 or 30 years younger than the septuagenarians, viewed the situation

differently, whereas the older generation must have remembered their wartime childhood and Khrushchev's thaw, which enabled them to understand a lot of things that escaped the younger ones.

— You have mentioned the propaganda machine working towards creating negative images of the opposition. Among the most wide-spread cliches is the label of "nationalists".

— I used to laugh a lot when I was labelled a Belarusian nationalist in the press. I took it as a compliment, since I come from Ukraine, though I was born in Poland. My mother was a Ukrainian and my father was a Russian. Russian was my native language, because my father was a military man and we often had to move from one city to another. I studied at 18 schools all in all. But for Russian, I would not have learnt any language at all, because each republic had its own native language. I had never learnt Belarusian before I was elected to parliament. Very few people spoke Belarusian at the time. Although I spoke Russian, I never felt ill at ease with my Belarusian-speaking colleagues, even with Zianon Pazniak, who was accused of nationalism more often than the others. When he saw from my reaction that I did not understand anything, he put it in Russian.

During the 1991 coup I was staying in Alushta with my sister and studying Belarusian. My method was very simple: I took a dictionary, read it page by page and then spoke Belarusian with my sister. Of course, she couldn't check me up. It is always easier to start speaking a new language with those who are not very good at it, because you do not feel embarrassed about making mistakes.

When the coup began, of course, I had to go back to Minsk, but it was not so easy. I had a ticket for September, so I had to buy a new one at an exorbitant price. In Minsk I was entitled to write a resolution on the dismissal of the communist party. I remember Lavon Barscheuski, one of the BPF opposition parliamentarians, reading it and shouting out, "Hey, fellows, Galina has written it in Belarusian!" Ever since, I have been making speeches in Belarusian only, which was quite difficult at first.

I know from my own experience that the BPF has never treated anyone badly just because they speak Russian. Well, every party, like every family, has its dimwits and we might have had some, too. In my opinion, it is just stupid to force anyone to learn the language. If I had been **coerced** into studying Belarusian, I would have made a point of not doing so.

Things turned out in such a way that learning Belarusian became a must for me. After all, I was a member of **Belarusian** parliament. The only category that, in my opinion, can be made to learn the language is civil servants, because they are paid to work for Belarusian state institutions. As for all others, any pressure in this issue is pointless. I remember an acquaintance of mine being forcefully taught Belarusian at the age of 65. She did not make any progress. Actually, she did not need to learn the language.

People supporting the Belarusian language do so because they have to stand up for their rights, not because they are some "rogues”. It is an undeniable human right to speak the language of your native country. In the 1990s you could easily hear people speaking Belarusian in the streets, whereas at present it can hardly be heard any more. This is too bad. The first thing that distinguishes one nation from another is the language. I know from my own experience that when I began to speak Belarusian my character slightly changed. Certain things can influence all of us in some unknown ways. There are some Russians who do not like anyone to speak Belarusian in their presence, but it is their problem. If you do not like the language, why not live in another country, where Belarusian is non-existent? A Russian arriving in Germany, Poland or France cannot expect to be addressed in Russian only. Why should Belarus be different?

By the way, there are some BPF Sojm members who still speak Russian when they want to put their ideas into words with maximal clarity. Nobody criticises them.

It would be wrong to say that BPF members are all nationalists in a brutal sense. They are just people who are worried about the fate of their nation.

— How do you understand happiness?

— Once I read a phrase, which I liked immensely, that happiness means being delighted to go to work in the morning and just as delighted to come back home in the evening. As I see it, happiness is about some harmony. But it is rather a complex notion. I like to think of myself as a happy person, since I have fulfilled myself both as an individual and a citizen, doing my best to help people.

What also makes me happy is my family. I love my home, I love my children and grandchildren. It is so fascinating to watch a tiny baby just brought from the maternity ward turning into a smart little human as

he or she is learning to walk, talk and reason. I cannot help wondering at this transfiguration. I have always enjoyed watching my children and grandchildren. My son has a daughter, Natasha by name. She is six and a half, a smart pretty girl, who is doing Latin American dances. And my grandson lives with me, we love singing, dancing and growing plants together. To see his eyes shine with joy when he notices a new flower blossom also makes me happy.

GALINA SIUCHYK



Recorded on 24.05.2006

She has a lot of icons of the Mother of God at home, which can however be easily explained. She is the Mother herself. One can easily understand that from the answers Galina Siuchyk gave to my questions. To be more exact, her surname sounds as Lukašova–Siuchyk .

— You've got three children?

— Quite right. I've got the sons Viachaslau and Kanstancin and the daughter Galina. Viachaslau is a very talented person. Unfortunately he's devoted himself to politics. I express regret primarily because it's a very dangerous occupation. In the Belarusian Popular Front he was pictured as a radical. They said they were intellectuals and he was a straight-out revolutionary. It always somewhat grated on me. He is a very well-educated person. Even in his early childhood I always saw him with a book. He took interest in everything. All of my children left the mathematical school number 50. Slava was a capable pupil, I was told ones by the head of the school (who taught mathematics) that he was always the first to answer the most difficult questions. The teacher of history who still works there also liked him very much. Our family studies geology through three generations. It must have influenced Slava's choice. The education in geography in our Belarusian State University is on a rather high level. Besides geography they study physics, mathematics, chemistry, economics, political science etc. Such knowledge comes in handy for a politician.
I faced the hard times thrice. In 1986 the Chernobyl catastrophe happened, in 1996 Viachaslau was put into prison and in 1998 I lost

my husband.

...The pickets were placed in front of the prison. They must have expected some political statements from me, but I said that nearby the maternity hospital where he was born was situated. He was such a handsome infant that everyone came to wonder at him and weighed 4 kilograms and 600 grams. He had thick curly shoulder-length mahogany hair. I asked whether I had given birth to him so that he suffered. He never used bad language and was always polite and easy-tempered, that's why my son's staying with the criminals in the Valadarka prison came as a shock to me.

By the way, Slava and Koscia went to the first form absolutely in the same way. One and the same episode happened. While the first-formers were approaching the building, Koscia was walking side by side with a girl. He let her pass into the school first and all the others followed her. He was the last to enter the building together with the teacher. Eight years before the same had happened to Slava.

And all of a sudden he was in prison. I even felt guilty as I couldn't help. The feeling remains. However old the child is, his mother is responsible for his life, which she's given him. All of my children were desired ones and I'm very sad about Slava's unhappy lot, although he never complains. I know that if he had an opportunity to start anew, he would act in the same way. Among other things he would have repeated the hunger-strike that I disapproved of. Perhaps it was necessary from the political point of view, but I consider going on hunger-strikes in our country senseless. One can't find non-governmental mass media resources with high circulation, popular sympathy and public solidarity in our society. A hunger-strike is like a voice crying in the wilderness. It's terrible, as a hunger-strike is a final step of despair. It takes place when a person can do nothing else. I mean a real hunger-strike in protest, not a starvation diet according to Bragg or Malachau. It's detrimental to health. Perhaps it was due to the fact that his kidneys failed to work, that he was released from prison.

When my son was behind the bars, I longed to break the stone walls with bare hands.

I would have done it for sure if I had the necessary physical power. This was because of despair.

I had no contacts with my son. Slava's wife, Ania, went on a hunger-strike out of solidarity. She had a seven-month baby at that time. I

went to the investigator and told him I wouldn't answer for myself if something happened to my grandson. After that they passed a note from Slava where he asked Ania to stop the hunger-strike and they permitted him to have an appointment with his wife.
By the way, its exactly ten years since these events, as it all happened in May 1996. I always had heart problems, but I never took validol at that time. I had no pain at all. I even didn't cry.
— As far as I know, he has some problems with native justice even now.
— Once I counted, that he was imprisoned in the Akrescina prison for more than 20 times, where he'd spent nearly a year. He had three concussions of the brain.
On March 23 he was cynically and cruelly kidnapped from the October Square which is called Kalinouski Square by the participants of the tent town. By the way, I was arrested on the same day. Interesting indeed it is, that I even didn't manage to come there. I made dough so that to bring patties for the guys. I telephoned the Great Patriotic War Museum, where I helped to open a showcase on land-lease (Kanstancin Lukashou, my husband's father, headed the purchasing committee) and I was asked to come by 11.30. On the way home I was detained at the corner of the Engels Street and the avenue (I won't name it as it's been renamed so often that one might make a mistake) by a few young men, who appeared all of a sudden. They didn't introduce themselves and wore civil clothes, they twisted my arms so that it hurt and dragged me to the bus. They tore out the buttons from my coat. I asked them to let me go, saying I won't run away being 64 years old, but they wouldn't listen. There was a scene of confusion in the bus. I had a folder with the documents dated by the forties in English (later it was taken away from me for around 40 minutes). They wanted to let me go, but suddenly someone cried in a harsh voice over the walkie-talkie: "It's Sivchik's mother!" It terrified me to realize in what a country we live, as even the fascists didn't touch the mothers of the Young Guard on the occupied territories during the war. I realized that being the mother of a famous oppositionist was my entire misdemeanor. Someone must have wanted to influence Slava in this way. They wanted to make him nervous and relax his vigilance. They didn't bring me to the Akrescina prison, I wasn't convicted like my cultured acquaintances of "obscenity and resisting the police". I

was "saved" by a heart attack. I had a heart seizure and they called in an ambulance. I refused from hospitalizing, so I got the medical treatment in the car and they let me go home. It was around 4 p.m.

In an hour Viachaslau got a telephone call allegedly from the American Embassy. Someone said in the voice that resembled the voice of the ambassador's interpreter that an urgent meeting with the ambassador was needed. The number wasn't specified, but it didn't put my son on his guard. He told them he would be arrested as soon as he left the tent settlement. "The Americans" foresaw it and sent a "diplomatic" car. The guys created a passage for him to reach the car and he got in. Near the "Žuravinka" place the car suddenly stopped and the unknown masked people dragged him into the bus. They started beating him, threatening and set a pistol against the back of his head.

— It sounds like some cheap detective story...

— Unfortunately this is what our reality is like. The price is enormous — it's the price of a human life!

As a person who possesses the analytical way of thinking, Slava realized he faced the chance of becoming the fifth "disappeared" person. Besides, the authorities had stated numerous times before that the opposition was ready to murder one of their activists. He heard the kidnappers say they were being shadowed. For a few hours they had been trying to break away and even proposed their authorities to throw out the corpse without stopping but the plans were changed. It was decided to bring Slava to the district administration of internal affairs of the Central district. There they drew up "the report of arrest" where the witnesses were different from those who detained him. He was brought to The Akrescina prison afterwards. Slava was thrown into the camera unconscious. On the next day he was brought to court where the judge inquired about the reason for such severe beating and then called in the ambulance for what I can be only grateful to him.

In the morning Ania found out that the American Embassy had nothing to do with the events. Everything went dark before my eyes. At noon my son phoned and said he was in the admission department of the clinical hospital No. 3. I came there very soon. His face was swollen because of the blows, but I thanked God sincerely that my son stayed alive.

Then Slava was put to hospital, where the doors of his cubicle were watched day and night by some dreadful people. I was afraid very

much that he would be kidnapped one more time. That’s why my son and his friends kept vigil in the hospital yard. In a few days Slava was discharged from hospital, although he was far from recovery. Some unknown people stood in front of the cubicle and didn’t introduce themselves even to the OSCE Ambassador Mr. Peterson. I asked as many people as I could invite to come to hospital. Some unknown people in civil clothes tried to detain Slava, but they didn’t manage to. People protected him and he reached the car in a tight circle of friends and journalists. The car started with a jerk. The policeman ran after it. Later they tried to trump up the charges of an "automobile-pedestrian accident injuring a policeman"; although everybody saw it hadn’t happened. The policeman showed a medical certificate with the diagnosis "craniocerebral injury" from the hospital No. 9. They weren’t confused by the fact that the alleged fact took place near hospital No. 3. Kanstancin was said to be driving. They wanted both of my sons to be involved.

— Can you tell us about him in greater detail?

— Koscia is much younger than Slava. Besides, I have a daughter Halia who has been disabled from her childhood. By the way, in spite of that she graduated from an ordinary school, although I was advised on the contrary. She studied at the same school with Koscia and he took care of her. It was a non-child duty.

Frankly speaking, I wanted a girl to be born to make company for my daughter. Koscia weighed 4400 gr. He had bad luck, he could have died a few times. I’ve got anemia and the doctors feared maternal death. That’s why I was put for in-patient treatment and blood transfusion had to be performed. I was on the operating table when I heard the hospital nurse talking about blood group number four. I have blood group number two and I informed them about it. You should have seen the mess! The doctors realized they had barely murdered me.

When Koscia was born, his navel-string was tied in a bundle. He must have turned inside the womb and could have strangled himself. But God saved him. That must be fate, I’ve come to life with difficulty as well for some special mission. Perhaps the only mission was to give birth to my children.

I was born in December 1941. My mother Liubou Aliaksieye□na became pregnant before the war and wanted to make an abortion, but my father Vasil Ramanavich strongly objected it. He was going to

the front and wanted to see his child on his return. I had a brother four years and a half older than me. Saying figuratively, my mother took him by the hand, equipped them with what she could find and set on her journey to the faraway Pietropavlovsk. It's hard to believe what a difficult time she had. And she was only 26.

It was 50 degrees of frost in winter. In Pietropavlovsk she got a note about father's death. She was brought to maternity hospital on a cart. She told me how she had asked the head physician after my birth to let her stay till summer by enrolling her for any post as she had no clothes for the child. He answered there was no such possibility. At that moment we were told someone came to take us away. It turned out to be the wives of the officers our father fought together with. They made clothes for me out of soldier foot wraps. A Studebaker without windowpane came to fetch us to the place where my brother was waiting. He wore a fur coat and played snowballs inside the house, the walls were covered with ice. My mother said when she was changing my clothes, she could see the exhalation. I fell ill and my mother put cotton wool around me. I kept on crying. It turned out that the cotton wool was covered with manganese crystals. I still have marks on my skin.

The note about my father's death came before my birth. Moreover, one of the officers said he had buried my father with his own hands. Suddenly my father returned. He was strongly shell-shocked and could fight no more. He was left on home front and prepared the soldiers for the front. He lived for only 64 years.

Kanstancin wanted to enter the Moscow University but his grandfather who was in hospital at that time and whom Koscia visited in the evening asked him to enter the university in Minsk. He said no university could give him what a grandfather, father and home library could. It was their last talk. At night grandfather passed away. Kanstancin applied for a place in geographic faculty of the BSU from which his father and elder brother graduated successfully. He studied very well, but then fell ill. I suppose this was the Chernobyl consequence. When he was in the 9th form they lived in a tent in Kryžouka district. There my son got under the rain. He told me the grass had been unusually sticky with a yellowish-white film. It happened on April 26-27, 1986 and the immunity was weakened. In 1989 the doctors diagnosed mononucleosis, a blood disease. By the way, they diagnosed rightly only after three months. The

hematologist took him to make ultrasound examination. The liver and spleen were enlarged greatly. She whispered to another doctor: "What a pity for this young handsome guy. He's got lymphogranulomatosis". Koscia heard it. At home he looked up the medical encyclopedia and didn't tell anybody first. But one night he said "Mum, I want to make you ready for it. I'll die soon. I've heard the diagnosis". In order to calm him down I told him it was a mistake and he must have the mononucleosis, about which I had heard from an acquaintance. Fortunately it turned out to be the truth.

— Can you tell us how your flat was obstructed?

— It was on the April 17. Around ten o'clock someone ringed and said the burglar alarm had snapped into action and asked to let them in. I was very surprised as our flat was not under guard. I phoned the security department. They explained that a computer failure had occurred and proposed me to let the policemen enter the flat and have a look. I refused to do so. In some time the policemen left and some unknown people who looked like gangsters stayed at the landing. Electricity was switched off in my flat. I phoned the housing and communal services department and invited an electrician. In two hours electricity turned on. The electricians also asked me to open the door. I told them I was afraid of probable bandits who were standing at the landing. No one could get into my flat as the unknown stood in the department and in the yard as well. The on-door speakerphone broke down. And it doesn't work till now.

At 8 p.m. Valery Shchukin phoned and told me he would come with Vital Harbusau, the "Narodnaya Volia" reporter. I phoned the neighbours and asked them to open the front door for them.

Harbusau managed to come in, but Shchukin didn't. He was grabbed and thrown on the floor of the landing. Four unknown people in civil clothes wouldn't let me close the door. They didn't say anything and didn't show any documents. Then the workers of the special forces joined them and said they were waiting for the person on town duty. My friends called the police. Around 10 p.m. our district militia officer came. I let him survey the flat where the alleged "criminal", my son Viachaslau was said to be hiding. Of course he didn't find anybody. The obstruction was lifted and I could close the door.

— One more bad detective story… What is the essence of happiness in your opinion?

— This is a very complicated question. It's much easier to put into words what misfortune is. The enumeration can take a few pages. What about happiness? Is it an elusive bluebird? The absence of misfortune isn't perceived as happiness. The escape from some disaster can be interpreted as happiness. What a happiness it is to recover from some long-lasting illness! Happiness is a very subjective condition. For example when I rushed to the admission room of the town clinical hospital No.3 on March 24 and saw the swollen face of my son Viachaslau I felt happy that he was alive as I was afraid that they would murder him. There is a wonderful Jewish anecdote about a Jewish rabbi and his pieces of advice to buy and to sell a she-goat. I'm the child of war, that's why from early childhood I always expected that some great happiness would be followed by tears. Therefore I have some mystical fear of being happy. But looking back at my life I can say with confidence I'm a happy person. My father returned from the front in the time when most of my peers became orphans. I met a wonderful, wise, courageous, strong and tender friend, a like-minded person, a significant other, I loved and was loved. And it's great happiness to make something pleasant for the others! It's even pleasant to cook a tasty dinner or supper, to get some sincere gratitude and so on. At moments of despair now I calm myself down with recollections. What a happy mother I was when my children were small! They were so beautiful and loved and sincerely loving! I remember the first smile, the first steps and the first words, said, then read and written by each of them. Their achievements and pleasures brought me more happiness than my own. I remember how I burst into tears of joy when my daughter sat down and clapped her hands; the doctors said she had muscular dystrophy and she would never get up but lie down. On that day Slava made the first note in his diary: "Mum cried her eyes out today because Halachka clapped her hands". Such moments of happiness help one live.

NINA STUZHYNSKAYA



Recorded on 20.10.2006

Nina Stuzhynskaya's name is well-known. She has a doctor's degree in history, being one of the leading experts in the 1920s anti-Soviet insurgencies in apparently tolerant Belarus. The subject is extremely inconvenient for the Belarusian authorities. Now let Nina Stuzhynskaya speak for herself.

— When and where were you born?

— In Hlinnaja Slabada village, which was then part of Kalinkavichy district (now it belongs to Rechyca district). I was the eldest child. My sister Ludmila and brother Alaksandar were born in Kazakhstan. My father Ivan Sieviaryn was very good with machines, so he went to work as a driver in the virgin lands of Kazakhstan. My maiden name was Sieviaryn, because it was not typical of our local dialect to add feminine inflections to women's names. A funny thing once happened to me in this connection. I was pregnant and doing my post-graduate course when the local military enlistment office began looking for conscript N. I. Sieviaryn. When they came to the university personnel department to ask where Sieviaryn was, they were told he was just about to have a baby. By the way, there were a lot of similar incidents, since some mental stereotypes require that women's names should have feminine inflections, like in Russian.

I remember when I was having some problems with getting a job after my post-graduate studies, I asked writer Ivan Navumienka, who came from the same parts, for assistance. As soon as he heard the name of my village, he exclaimed, "But you are not Belarusians! I studied your "specific" vernacular as a post-graduate student: in all

the neighbouring villages they pronounce [a] where you say [o]!" The thing is that there are three villages in Homiel region which, in Ivan Navumienka's opinion, were founded after Russian dissenters had moved there. They are Hlinnaja Slabada, Aúciuki Major and Aúciuki Minor. The latter is the very village that writer Uladzimir Lipski is trying to present as a Belarusian Gabrovo, famous for its dwellers" unique sense of humour.

I was four when my parents moved to the virgin lands of Kazakhstan. We lived near Pavlodar, in the so-called 7th settlement, which must have been founded by political exiles. By the way, all my relatives have recently returned from Kazakhstan to Belarus virtually as refugees. All that is left in Kazakhstan is my father's grave.

But it was there that I went to school, which was large and multinational, Ingushes, Chechens, Germans, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Russians studying together. The school gave me an understanding of cultural diversity and taught me how to respect it. German families, exiled from the Volga basin and the Caucasus, set up a certain cultural standard for us. Belarusian and Ukrainian families tried to keep closer to them, settling in German streets, if an opportunity presented itself.

I was lucky to have a lot of good teachers at school. They were Germans by origin. A lot of them have emigrated to Germany, but most of them have passed away. By the way, I owe them my good command of the German language.

It was already quite clear at the time that the so-called "proletarian internationalism" was like a house of cards, built on disrespect towards national dignity. National conflicts that emerged like nuclear mushrooms after the collapse of the USSR were latently present long before those events. The problem was that they were just impossible to grasp, as we lacked social experience. To my mind, the white people's policies (I mean Russians in the first place) towards the indigenous groups were disgusting. Of course, there were some exceptions to the rule because some people remembered that they had not moved to Kazakhstan of their own free will. The nationality issues were like litmus test on one's culture. Some "guests" showed their superiority and contempt for the local population, without making any effort to learn the country's culture, traditions and customs. Large national groups lived separately from one another, mixed marriages were disapproved of both among the Kazakhs and the Germans and the Russian-speaking population.

I still remember an episode that illustrates the situation. Our group of students was travelling from Pavlodar to Karaganda when a Kazakh boy asked if he could come to see me at my place. I said "yes”. Then he asked, "But you are a white girl. Is that O.K. if I call on you?’
In my first year at Karaganda University, where I studied history, I shared a big room in the students" hall of residence with four Kazakh girls, two Germans and a half-Moldavian. The Kazakhs are very hospitable by nature, so when one of the girls said that we were not wanted in Kazakhstan, we were shocked, to say the least of it. She said the Kazakhs had their own way of life and did not need any plants or factories built there on Moscow’s orders and polluting the soil. It happened in 1972, which was by all standards a happy and peaceful time!

— Why did you choose history?

— To tell the truth, I really do not know. I had a way with words and impressed the examination board so much that they suggested to me that I should get transferred to the department of philology, where the competition was not that fierce, but I refused.
I got transferred to Belarusian State University in 1973. When I began studying Belarusian history, I was deeply disappointed. Now that I had some idea of Kazakh history, Belarusian historiography looked like a neglected child. I was under the impression that Belarusian history was a slightly altered poor copy of Russian history. By the way, one of my lecturers was the infamous L. S. Abecedarski. I was also shocked by the fact that Belarusian was almost non-existent. Of all my fellow-students the only one who spoke Belarusian was Mikola Nikalajeú, who is now the head of the Belarusian community in St.Petersburg.
At university I was also taught by Piotra Kraúchanka. Some people disapprove of him, I know, but I have the best memories of this person. He really loved history and tried to pass this love down to us. It was him who suggested that I should do my doctorate on the subject called "political banditry" at the time, which later on transformed itself into the anti-Soviet movement. He often offered me a helping hand, knowing well that I did not have a pull to rely on. For a few years, as a post-graguate student and then a lecturer, he was in charge of our group of students when we were sent to help pick up potatoes in kolkhozes[3].

[3] It was a common practice in the Soviet Union that students had to spend September picking up potatoes on collective farms (*kolkhozes*) instead of studying.

The guys from our group were angry at Kraúchanka, because he never let them relax, so instead of boozing they played football at the end of a day. Unlike some other lecturers on a farm, he was never idle, always working together with his students.

I was often ill, probably due to the climate change. I had no relatives in Minsk and Kraúchanka never forgot to take me back home from hospital when leaving a kolkhoz with a group of students at the end of September.

— Did you do you post-graduate studies right after obtaining your first degree?

— No. First I had to work for three years at a village school, where I was assigned as a university graduate. It was located in Piekary village of Maladziechna district, which was quite far from Maladziechna. When I first came there it struck me as a rural backwater, lost in the middle of nowhere. I still remember vividly my arrival: there was mud everywhere and I was wearing fashionable green shoes. I cried my eyes out all the way from Piekary to Maladziechna, which took me about an hour. I received a warm welcome in the village, but it turned out that there was no work for a young teacher, who had graduated from university with First Class Honours, at the local school. However, the head of the district education office insisted on my staying at Piekary. He did not favour healthy young people assigned to work in his district upon graduation. Some time later I realised why he harboured a grudge against the whole world, not just me personally. His only son was seriously ill, so he kind of revenged on all healthy people. They got me to teach history and German.

Having worked in Piekary for a year, I was "rescued" from there by the Komsomol, as they appointed me secretary of the Komsomol Committee of Biarezina vocational training school, which was near Maladziechna. There were boys only among its students. Such schools had no selection procedure for applicants but accepted everyone in order to meet the target for the number of students, just as they do now at private universities. So there were a lot of problem children studying at vocational school. However, it helped me develop my character.

It was there that I bought my first car and got married.

I met my future husband on 8 March, the Women's Day. I had told the dean of studies that I needed some help with the car and he recommended Mikalaj Stužynski. I liked the name very much. We got

married a year after we first met and have been together for 26 years already.

— How come that you have gone into politics?

— What makes a woman go into politics is either her profession or the man she loves. With me it was the former. I was doing my research on anti-Bolshevik peasants' uprisings in Belarus when Gorbachev's perestroyka began. I was eager to contribute my knowledge to the cause of the revival of Belarus and chose to join the Peasants' Party with the late Mr Luhin at its head. I had a very vague idea of party development and effectiveness at the time. Unfortunately, one of the most numerous parties failed to stay in politics and got dissolved without leaving any noticeable impact.

In 1995 I joined the social democrats on Michas Charniauski's recommendation. From 1998 to 2004 I was their Deputy Chairperson. When Aliaksandar Kazulin's faction came into being and the party split up, I chose to belong to the social democratic wing which still recognises Mikola Statkievich as its leader. Party work became quite a new experience for me. I hope it will lead to some practical outcome. Well, actually, I am an optimist who hopes against hope: I do not remember my work for the party ever being appreciated. On the contrary, my colleagues have always reprimanded me. In general, those who tend to take a practical course of action are most vulnerable in party politics, because it is easy to criticise them. Women, who are known to have a good deal of practicality and wish to achieve some real measurable results but are not very experienced in political rhetoric, often become an easy target for their colleagues with a more theoretical mind.

Still, I give all my heart to the task of involving women in politics, since their pragmaticism and common sense are in dire need in this sphere.

As for the appraisal, well, in 2002 the Belarusian P.E.N.-Centre awarded me the Francishak Bahushevich Prize for my book The Rebellious Belarus.

— What is your understanding of happiness?

— It is harmony between my inner world and the world around us. I am sorry for those who are always dissatisfied with themselves and conscience-stricken. It can be an underlying cause of serious diseases.

— Could you say a few words about your children, please?

— My daughter's name is Volha. She is 25 and quite a well-known person already. People calling us keep asking if it is me or her speaking. When she was a child she used to say she would not go into politics, but things have turned out differently.

We are on friendly terms with ex-Ambassador for the USA to Belarus Daniel Speckhard, who is now working for NATO bodies. The Speckhards invited Volha to study in Brussels, where she graduated from university, which is affiliated with the University of Maryland. Volha got some practical experience by working for European Parliament and NATO Parliamentary Assembly and studied at Stanford University. She has recently been put in charge of the office For Democratic Belarus. In September 2006 Volha became number eight in the top ten rising stars on the European political scene.

My son Stanislau was born in 1986. He is a driver, like his grandfather Ivan was. At present he is studying at the Institute of Parliamentarism and Entrepreneurship.

VALANCINA SVIATSKAYA



Recorded on 22.10.2006.

She has been much told about lately in connection with her intention to have legal proceedings with the notorious former Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of Sport and Tourism general Sivakou, who is suspected of kidnapping political opponents of the incumbent authorities. The thing is that he has recently published an article in "Spetsnaz" magazine, openly stating his pro-fascist views. However this is not what we are going to discuss.

— Were you born in Belarus?

— No. I was born on May 29^{t}, 1958 in Kazakh sovkhoz named after Kazakhstan Central Executive Committee. My parents, as they said at that time, went to Kazakhstan to develop virgin and long-fallow lands at the call of the Party and government. There, in Kazakhstan, I graduated from school and department of physics and mathematics of the Saken Sejfullin Tselinograd State Teacher's Training Institute. Now it is Astana, and I don't know whether my institute is still "alive". So much has changed there! Someone told me, the university served as the basis for the Gumiliov Eurasian university. And when I see representatives from Kazakhstan at international seminars or conferences I want to have a look at my alma mater and see the town of my youth. This is a kind of nostalgia, to peep into a keyhole and come back to Belarus again.

After the institute I worked as a teacher of mathematics at my school. I remember how a colleague of mine went on maternity leave and I took charge of her 10th form. One day one of her students brings the register to teacher's room and, not seeing me, said angrily, "She is only a few

years older, but demands that we call her in name and patronymic". It was Siarozha Vinahradau. Then I came out of the niche and said, "If you were me, I would also call you in name and patronymic".
When I see rude militiamen, I always think that many of them could be my students in their age. This is an outrage and offence. I didn't teach that my students.
My father Anatol and mother Ksienija were born in Belarus. I remember, when I was still a little girl, my mother took me here, and all father's and mother's relatives gathered in a big house sitting along the walls looking at me. That was my debut.
Despite my very young age I "fell in love" with Belarus. When we got back to Kazakhstan, I whimpered and begged my parents to go back nearly every day. I was crazy about Belarus. And if I as an activist I was given a vacation, I always went to Belarus.
My father was in charge of a working committee, i.e. a trade union in the sovkhoz. My mother worked for communal services, retiring from there. And when later I filled in questionnaires, I wrote "born into a workers' and peasants' family" of my origin. Unfortunately, my father died in 1987. He died in Kazakhstan, but we buried him here, in his homeland. His grave is next to my grandmother's, his mother.
He died of trivial peritonitis at 59. He was dying absolutely conscious, knowing he had no chance. A tall, strong, healthy man! I'm not small (176 cm), and even wearing heels I was hardly up to his shoulders.
When I worked out at my native school, I came to Belarus and went to work to tractor plant. I'm still sorry I haven't worked as a teacher any more, though all my thoughts were about teaching.
— Why did you move to Miensk?
— The reason is simple as that — my brother and sister had already moved here. My brother's name is Valer, and sister's is Viera, we are all "V.A"..
My working career at the plant started in a data-computing centre, where I was a programmer. My career would go on, if not for "the call of Komsomol".
It happened this way. One day we had a portback election. My age didn't allow me to get elected. So I was sitting quietly drawing "squiggles". Everything went formally, i.e. one leader was to be changed by another. It went according to the plan, if we put it shortly. But suddenly something "clicked", some sort of teacher's syndrome worked out. I stood up and

said they did the wrong thing and there were a lot of interesting things to do. Everyone put away their squiggles and listened to me attentively. And in spite of the party bureau opinion I was elected secretary of Komsomol organization. I couldn't defend myself.

So I had to attend consultations at the plant's Komsomol committee, which had "regional" status. I wasn't "exempt", so I heard out reproaches from my direct boss about my absences. My activity was noticed though. One day I was invited to talk to Uladzimier Ryhoravich Halko, 1st secretary of the party city committee and head of the Party committee of the tractor plant. He "saw through me" and wanted to find out why I wasn't a party member yet. At that time I was an engineer. I simply didn't want to enter the party, I had seen enough of that, when people did it for the sake of material benefits. One more thing — I don't like orders. If an engineer wanted to enter the party, the party assembly had to admit four workers into the party. So that category of workers sort of queued for their admittance. I don't like queues as such and in that case I didn't accept them at all. Naturally I didn't tell him about that and limited myself to quoting a line from the Statute, saying that evidently the party members of the research-and-development centre of the plant didn't see me prepared enough morally and politically. Some time later I got a phone call, and secretary of party bureau of the research-and-development centre ordered: quickly run to the sector of party register, take a form there, and at the next assembly we're going to admit you to the party. I said it wasn't April 1st (it was another month) and such a joke wouldn't work. I hang up the receiver. He phoned me once again and said he wasn't kidding and the party assembly was to begin in 15-20 minutes. I answered I was not going to be in derision and hanged up the receiver once again. After that came a call from the plant party committee and I understood they were not kidding. This is how I became a candidate for membership in the CPSU.

Soon after Halko called me and offered a disposed Komsomol work. I rejected, motivating that decision by my Komsomol age, which was about to end. He gave me some time to think. But again he got a negative answer and roughly noted that candidate's record was given to check my moral and business qualities. So I got into the plant Komsomol committee and then was admitted to the party committee and to the party city committee, where I met the collapse of the CPSU and the country named the USSR.

— As far as I know, you haven't studied Belarusian, still you were admitted to the Belarusian Language Association...

— Exactly. It happened this way. I was working at the tractor plant party committee and suggested our secretary speaking Belarusian on a grand meeting on the occasion of an anniversary of the Great October socialist revolution. He liked the idea. The script was written by me and an instructor, she had studied the language and got only "fives" for it, unlike me. However it didn't prevent her from asking me Belarusian equivalents of this or that Russian word. The speech created a total furore. No one had expected that from the secretary. Deputy director of the Palace of culture personally thanked me for that.

I opened Belarusian courses based in the class of political education, the plant housed lectures in Belarusian history and culture, luckily we had a good basis for that — the Palace of culture.

When Belarusian Popular Front was formed, there came a suggestion to create the Belarusian language association. At the plant I had a workmate Kola Žukouski, he was my most active assistant and somewhat even a teacher (though he is younger than me, but he enjoyed the teacher's role). Kola was some sort of a freak BPF member. He was the person to propose my candidacy. Understandably there were "scouts" from the party staff who reproduced Kola's words almost exactly: "She knows Belarusian much worse than I do, but she does really a lot at the tractor plant for the language to take root". This is how I got to BLA.

Piotar Kuźmich Krauchanka was the then secretary of Miensk party ideological committee. He "raised a rumpus", saying why BPF guys are "promoting" party staff?

— How come that you found yourself working for Sharetski?

— By chance.

We were introduced to each other in late 1994. I was doing some business in a commercial structure, which was not quite successful, frankly speaking. Someone advised me to talk to Sharetski, saying he could suggest or recommend me something. Those days Siamion Hieorhijevich was creating Country party, before that he had been an agrarian issues advisor for Kiebich, and until that he had been running a farm. I thought we would only talk business, but he was speaking about his party. Moreover it turned out that he lived next door to me. I have to give credit to Mr Sharetski — he is good at persuading people. Soon I became a consultant and then a secretary.

I worked there until November 1996. And eventually left the party which had completely "lay" under the president. I took charge of the secretariat of the disgraced Supreme Council of the XIII assembly and worked there till the end.

— Then you came to BPF?

— Exactly.

I had previously been to two parties and naturally never wanted to enter any organization any more and politely rejected all the proposals.

In 2004 I participated in the election campaign, though initially it was clear the authorities were not going to let a single opposition deputy into the House of representatives. My constituency supported me by their signatures. Party BPF decided to back me up. When I made the final decision to run for the office (so that no one could blame me for being mercantile) I entered BPF of my own free will, since I understood it corresponded to my views to a certain extent.

Collecting signatures went well. Frankly speaking I didn't expect such progress, because official propaganda had been "brainwashing" our people for decades and the result could be the most negative. However, thanks God, our people can tell the good seeds from the evil ones, and it makes me happy and inspires for the future.

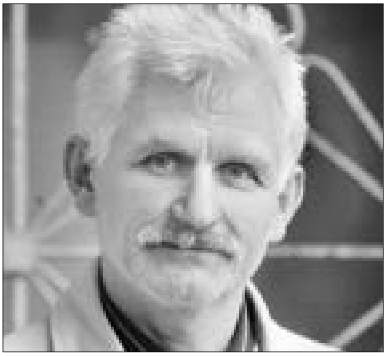
— And what about human happiness?

— Sometimes, when in despair, I want to embrace myself and cry. Nonetheless I think myself a happy person! Why? Because I can speak out what I think and do it aloud, without ever looking around. What I do is always comfortable to me. I'm a free person. I don't need to clone myself. I feel sorry for our officials. They think one thing, speak another, do something else and at the same time they fear, since any of them can be jailed every minute. Poor things. I guess they're not always frank to their wives, because they are afraid of "bugging". Similarly to their friends — for fear of denunciation. They're afraid of their own shadows.



FROM THE BOOK "DESTINIES"

ALES BIALIATSKI



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I learnt about their activities several years before I got acquainted with Ales Bialiatski in person. The new authorities just started cleaning up the opposition, and it was something sensational for independent journalists. We were about a dozen people who gathered near the Soviet district police department. It was night. It was cold. A girl was asking about details of the detention. I asked my colleagues: "Who is she?" And heard: the newly set-up human rights center Viasna-96.

First steps

He was born on September 25, 1962 in Karelia, a village of Viartsilia, Sortavala district. In Soviet times famous skis were made there, in Sortavala, many people used to ski on them. I will explain why it was that far, because anyway I am from a Belarusian family. After the Soviet-Finnish war, new lands were to be developed, and the serf Soviet peasants found a possibility to escape the "kolkhoz paradise". The Bialiatskis family, once pretty wealthy, turned almost into paupers after collectivization. At the beginning of 1940 six children of my grandfather Ustsin started to swell from hunger, because there was literally nothing to eat. So my grandfather decided to leave his native places — the Rahachou area. He was "recruited" to the "occupied lands".

Thus, my father Viktar Ustsinavich, aged 10 (he was born in 1929), turned up to be to the north of the Ladoga. My mother Nina Aliaksandrauna Kavalchuk, born in Narauliany district, also got to Karelia through recruitment, but in different times, after WWII. I was named Ales after my grandfather. He first fought as a partisan, and then "went missing" at the front.

There, in Karelia, my parents got acquainted and married in 1956, and got back to Belarus in 1964 when I was two years old.
At those times new factories were emerging in Belarus, and labor force was in demand. My parents considered the mines of Salihorsk and the chemicals plant in Svetlahorsk, and chose the latter as it was closer to Rahachou and Naroulia. And this is the place of a conscious part of my childhood.
There was nowhere to live, so workers were allowed to construct temporary dwelling. It was built from all materials possible, everything at hand, and winter wind was almost buzzing in cracks and mice were running across the floor. Once I caught a mouse and presented it to my mother as a gift.
At that time I've become a bibliophile, though nobody taught me how to read. I learnt everything myself. When I was five, I was reading the ABC and asking my brother: "What's this letter? What's that?" My parents were surprised to find out that I'd learnt to read. Until the fifth form, I knew no fear and loved fighting, and did it successfully as nobody expected a stroke from a left-hander. And then I turned into a bookworm and started to spend more time indoors.
I was turned from a left-hander into a right-hander: I was forced to write with my right hand, and that's why I've taken offence at the Soviet system of upbringing since my childhood (*laughs — note*).

Fate's decree

I studied in secondary school No5 in Svetlahorsk, from the first to the last school year, and lived next door to it. I went into the first form on my own, without my parents — did not want them to accompany me. There were lots of pupils, so I got directly into class 1 "I". Our class was very friendly. We went to pick up potatoes, beetroots, went hiking by ourselves. We hanged out together not only in school, but also after lessons. How many things we've done! For example, once we drank too much of port...
By the way, almost everyone entered institutes and universities because we had studied well. I chose the Homel university, or to be more precise, the Belarusian-Russian department of the history and philology faculty.
In 1981, with the money gained in the student builders" team, I went on tour around historic sites of Belarus — somewhere on bus routes, and

somewhere hitch-hiking and walking. I had plenty of impressions. The main one is that the Belarusian language was alive! Unlike nowadays, it was spoken everywhere in villages and small towns. During the trip I happened to be at Mikalayeushchyna, the "native nook" of Yakub Kolas. The centenary of Uncle Yakub's birth was approaching, so some artists were working there. They must have gotten some state order. Mikola Kupava was the most active among them.

I was impressed by their Belarusian language. This was the reason for our acquaintance. Mikola asked: "What's your name?" I answered "Sasha". And Kupava said: "No, your name is not Sasha, but Ales". So, 19 years of age, I became Ales" and since that time I speak only Belarusian. I decided that all things connected with that will be in the first place in my life. In fact, it happens so.

In 1984 I graduated from university and worked as a teacher for several months in Lelchytsy district, and then I proceeded to postgraduate school of the Literature Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR.

A year and a half later I was called up to the Soviet Army — there was no adjournment for post-graduate students. I did my military service near Sverdlovsk as a mechanic driver of an armored heavy hauler at an antitank artillery battalion.

The military service was hard for me, not physically but rather morally. In my thoughts I was all in Belarus. I jumped out from the army like a cork from a bottle. After soldier's military service, two months" courses for officers were provided. I did not proceed to getting lieutenant's stars, I played my demob chord, only not to stay extra months in army, and left for to continue my studies. Clean shoulder straps — clean conscience, as they say.

Against the wind

When I left the army, fresh winds were blowing in the Belarusian capital. The youth association *Talaka* had already been registered and operated actively; lots of informal groups appeared in universities and different institutes. In spring 1986, the first dispersal of young people's group happened when they wanted to celebrate *Calling the Spring* rite in the Trinity Suburb. The authorities incited former Afghan war soldiers to fight "fascists" who in fact were students of art school named after Ivan Akhremchyk.

At that time society was somewhat electrified, and very soon I found lots of new fascinating friends, who were really colorful personalities. Suffice it to mention Aleh Bembel alone, whose native house is now a museum where literary, poetic and philosophical meetings have taken place many times.

We set up a narrower circle, including Vintsuk Viachorka, Siarhei Dubavets, Ales" Susha, Siarhei Voyush, me, Henadz Sahanovich and several more people. We acted then in a clandestine way: we gathered at a factory's utility room at Radiatarny, where Viktar Ivashkevich was working as a loader and held also similar views; we gathered at a kindergarten where one of my friends was working as a night watchman. We were developing our plans of actions and set entirely political goals for us. I remind that it was only 1986. If some agencies had found it out, it would have come up to a sticky end...

It was all luck again. *Perestroika* started, and plenty more opportunities for work appeared. What was harshly persecuted at the beginning of 1980s became almost lawful in the second half of the decade. Surely, certain conspiracy rules had to be observed, since the system remained the same.

Our activities were divided into two parts.

The clandestine part. No more than a dozen of like-minded people defined strategic directions of activities and were looking for the most effective ways to achieve our goals. They published a magazine *Burachok*, for distribution of which the militiamen for the first time arrested Viktar Ivashkevich's brother Yauhen.

The legal part. Talks about work of so-called "informal" organizations which united the youth according to their interests. One of them was established by me and Anatol Sys — the Society of Young Literary Men "Tuteyshyja".

The situation was also pretty critical for young literary men. Authors were already prone to write what they wanted. The canons of socialist realism not only didn't work, they made people feel sick. One wanted something different, something more truthful.

Our first session in the dormitory of Anatol Sys (Akademichnaya street) gathered nine people, whereas two months later the sessions were attended by several dozens of young people. Nowadays it is the backbone of the modern Belarusian literature. Thus, my life a kind of consisted of two halves — literary research and civil activities (I was

elected president of the *Tutejshyja*). And one half entirely depended on the other.
In 1987 we held rafting on the Dzvina river against the construction of a hydroelectric station there, and then the first Dziady, the first procession to Kurapaty (it took place just after Zianon Pazniak's article was published in LIM magazine), and also a demonstration to protect the Upper Town.
Some people erroneously consider that the first Dziady took place in 1988 when it first time smelt of the police's tear gas in Minsk. In fact it's not true. The first Dziady were held a year earlier near the monument to Yanka Kupala. In essence, a meeting-requiem took place there. A proper application to the authorities had been filed then in due time, but there had been no reaction, so those 300 people who came there did not know how it all would end. Thanks God, there were no grabs. The country's leadership were simply taken aback, as for 60 years of Soviet power there weren't any out-of-control demonstrations.
And, certainly, Dziady near the Maskouskija Graveyard held by *Tutejshyja* and other public associations. Then it was me and Anatol Sys who filed the application to the Minsk City Executive Committee. The city Society of Protecting Monuments and Culture joined us, then it was headed by the artist Vasil Sharanhovich, but later it gave up because the authorities officially banned the celebration "in relation with 60 years of komsomol".
We decided to hold the action although the authorities repeatedly called on us not to, and even tried to threaten. It sparked a contrary reaction. To our surprise, thousands of people came to Dziady-88.
The authorities were getting ready to disperse and block the demonstration. Later on I got hold of a document regulating how they were going to do that: one group blocks the leaders, another one seizes loudspeakers, etc. And they were following the scenario. I was arrested straight away. I must admit it caused an unexpected public outcry. The society turned indignant, people started thinking over what was happening and what to do. A month before an organizational committee of the Belarusian Popular Front had been set up, which gave thousands adherents to the new movement. Rapid democratic changes set off in Belarus. Nobody could foresee this. The young ages" dream about the country's independence came true.
By the way, I got my first fine in 1988: it was 200 Soviet rubles. This

sum was collected by my colleagues in the Institute of the Academy of Sciences. Maybe, this was the moment when a future human rights defender started to grow in me.

New colors

I completed my post-graduate courses in spring 1989, however, I did not defend my candidate's dissertation because then the time came when dissertation was not on the priorities list. The dissertation was about publicist poetry at the beginning of the 20 century, about poems by Yanka Kupala, Yakub Kolas, Maxim Bahdanovich, Ales Harun, who prophesized changes and called on the people to awaken. To a certain extent, our epochs were similar, that is why it was so curious for me. In 1991, on the basis of the dissertation, I published a book "Literature and nation" and decided it was enough.

I was not in high demand for employers. I tried to get a position in Mahilou or Vitsiebsk Pedagogical Institutes. In vain. I was not welcomed at the Academy, because during my studies I had ben twice expelled for the activities mentioned above. Every time I got away with it. Viktar Kavalenka, the head of the Literature Institute was a good man and always defended me. Officially, he answered OK to the party authorities and held a meeting in the Institute, at which the Vice President of the Academy Ivan Navumenka shouted: "How can that be that one postgraduate student took a dump in the hats of two academics and six doctors?" A regulation on expulsion was written. However, two days later, when I came to pick up my documents, Kavalenka said: "Keep learning, Ales, keep learning". Paradoxes of those times...

Nobody wanted to hire me, there was only one Homel left, where I came from, according to the compulsory placement of graduates. But then an opportunity appeared to "catch on" Minsk, to be precise, the newly opened Museum of History of the Belarusian Literature. It required new researchers, and, thanks to some wilful girls who worked there (first of all Iryna Marachkina, from *Talaka*), I was hired.

All over the Union there was a wave (from the very top) of electing heads of different factories and establishments. Soon, such a contest was announced in the neighboring Maxim Bahdanovich's museum. I was working as a junior research fellow, and I decided to take part in it.

There were four candidates, but I had all voices — this was the decision of a team decision. It should be remarked that it provoked

bewilderment at the Ministry of Culture, to put it mildly. They knew my biography well there. I was waiting for their confirmation for a whole month, and then the Minister Yauhen Vaytovich gave in — go ahead, you're appointed.

I faced new professional tasks because there was no usual exposition as such yet. There was a building, exhibits stored in its foundations, the exposition plan, wonderful girls, among whom I would like to single out a clever girl Vera Mikuta. I can't help mentioning also the great artist Eduard Ahunovich, author of the artistic image of the museum. In 1991 it was supposed to celebrate the centenary of Maxim Bahdanovich's birthday, and it was planned to open the museum in the Trinity Suburb.

Crazy work started with the exposition development and scientific endeavors, combined with the SU *"peculiarities"* of that time. The country suffered from total deficit. You received money for which you had nothing to buy. There was not much control from the Ministry of Culture, but there was huge inside responsibility. We were to launch the museum in due time. Thanks God, we managed. A couple of years after the launch, the museum exposition got awarded with the State Prize of Belarus.

Here is an interesting fact. In 1990 I was elected deputy of Minsk City Council and, when a year later it discussed the question of national symbolic, I brought the white-red-white flag which had been decorating the foyer of the museum. As soon as the new national symbol was approved by the City Council, several minutes later the flag was the first in the country to spread above Minsk City Executive Committee, and two weeks later it became the national banner.

While I was working in the museum, I did not stick to my governing position. I rather viewed the museum as a live platform, not as a depository of inanimate things, that's why we housed *Nasha Niva* of Dubavets for more than a year, and then *Svaboda* of Hermianchuk was located there for some time. The BPF *Uprava* (Board) and Sojm (Council) assembled there. Kaliady were celebrated there. The Belarusian Catholic Society gathered there. Dozens of non-state organizations were registered there. In a word, the museum was filled with the modern Belarusian life.

I worked as the head of the museum till 1998 and resigned at my own will. For the time of my work, I opened three more expositions in

different buildings (and even one in Yaroslavl). I was doing significant research work. Lots of literary performances were held there. It seems to me, the museum of those times was one of the best in our country.

Calling the spring

In the spring of 1996, when it became obvious where the new authorities were leading and that the new wave of national renaissance would meet hard times, we decided to establish a civil human rights organization named *Spring-96*. It aimed at showing solidarity and support to the first political prisoners. Also, the organization was aimed at providing legal aid to victims of political repressions, gathering and dissemination of human rights information and implementation of human rights educational activities.

The aid was different, including pecuniary assistance. The "first spoilt pancake" in this regard was quite unusual. A volunteer brought half a ton of all kinds of food — pasta, sugar, different cereals etc. And all our volunteers were occupied with sorting out all those things in packages that were later distributed to the aggrieved.

At first, for two years I combined my work in the museum with work in *Viasna*, but then I had to leave — my "literary science" and "museum science" biographies merged into one — human rights defense.

To tell the truth, when we were creating the organization, I did not think it would exist for so long. I thought that in two or three years (maximum five) the need for it would disappear at all, and we would get back to usual work — museum, literature, science, politics. Unfortunately, I was wrong.

From what we are doing now, I would like to single out elections observation: no changes are possible without it. It is essential in our situation; here lies the thing thanks to which the people have been staying in power since 1994 and up till now. If everything was transparent and democratic in our country, the authorities would have changed already, and not once.

There are more than dozen international and foreign partners of Viasna, and the center is part of two international structures, including the famous International Human Rights Organization (FIDH) with head-quarters in Paris that unites 170 human rights organizations all over the world. I was elected Vice President of FIDH at the Congress in

Lisbon in 2007. Norwegian parliamentarians twice nominated me for the Nobel Peace Prize. And this is not my personality that was definitive there — the goal was to attract the international community to human rights situation in Belarus.

Unfortunately, the need for this really exists. I will not list everything that happens during the so-called "Belarusian liberalization period". I will only remark than several thousand people a year address to *Viasna* for help. And this speaks thousand words...

In 1998 the human rights center Viasna-96 was registered, and two years later, when branches appeared, it became a nation-wide NGO. Nowadays, several hundred volunteers are members of Viasna. In 2003, the registration was cancelled. It has not been renewed either with the old or with the new title (*Nasha Viasna*, Our Spring). In fact, we got back to where I started in my youth, but at another level, with millions of pro-democracy and human rights people in the country. We have loads of work ahead, as before. There is much harvest and few sowers.

ALIAKSANDR JARASHUK



Prepared for publication on 14.05.2007

Probably, life of each of us is similar to a motion-picture film in some way. But Aliaksandr Jarashuk's life literally started with cinema.

First frames

I was born in one of the most beautiful places of our country, the village of Vnuchki in the Kamianiets district in the Brest region, near the Bielowieza forest, on 16 November 1951. Scorpio is the most enigmatic zodiac sign. Mine was normal childhood, typical to the post-war generation. I grew up in a peasant family. My father Illja Aliaksiejevich died on 15 November 2004, the day before my next birthday. He was in his 90^{th} year. My mother Praskouja Akimauna died twenty years earlier. The family was large: eight children, four brothers and four sisters; I am the youngest of them.

Childhood is an area in memory to which a person always returns in order to find a foothold in life because the foundations of a personality are laid during this period, in my opinion.

Certainly, there was always a lot of work in the large peasant family. But there also were genuine moments of child's joy, which can seem surprising and funny for today's children. For example, an opportunity to watch a movie was almost of an event of planetary significance for us. We simply did not have money for this. The ticket cost 50 kopecks before the monetary reform and 5 kopecks after 1961 but we had to find this money somewhere. I remember how we made "raids" on the collective farm's henhouse. A chicken egg was worth exactly 5 kopecks, i.e. one trip to the movie. And if the poultry woman caught you, it was a big tragedy...

I don’t remember the name of the first movie that I watched. I was about six years old at that time. I remember only that this movie was shown in one of the houses as there was no club in the village. My memory kept only fragments of it — plenty of soldier caps.
Later, they opened the club, a wooden hut with long benches. Movies were shown there regularly. Spy adventures were breathtaking. We returned home in dark night after the show. We saw a spy in every man. Horror. The "cold war" time…
I often remember the movie "On Distant Shores". I watched it about a dozen times.

Adolescence frames

I was named after my mother’s brother who perished three days before the end of the war. He was buried in Ostrava, in the Czech Republic.
I went to the primary school in a neighboring village in 1959. The school’s building was at the foot of a hill and there was a windmill at the top of the hill. In winter, we were tobogganing. Our teachers — former guerilla Ivan Vasiljevich and Palina Mikajlauna Stsiazhko, husband and wife — could not make us go home. Later, this school was transformed in an eight-grade school.
In 1967, I completed eight grades of school. I never had problems with studies, unlike with conduct…
I applied to the Pinsk Irrigation College. Why there? The notorious land rehabilitation process was gaining momentum in our region. I even worked in an expedition. I remember that I earned as much as 33 rubles. For an eight-grader this was enormous money; the villagers just started to be paid in cash then.
I was admitted in the college but I did not go to study there — I went to the ninth grade of the Dzmitravichy elementary school as a matter of principle. They took a long time to send the documents back from college and asked me repeatedly to come and study. I told my teachers about this but they thought that the problem was in the mark I got for conduct or, rather, that I did not want to show it.
I always preferred the humanities but I became … an agronomist as my eldest brother Vasil was an agronomist. My sister Nina got married and moved to Kursk, to her husband’s home. Vasil also went there to enter the Agricultural Institute in 1960. Nine years later, I went in his tracks. Today, I do not regret my choice and I bless my stars.

In the institute, they raised the question of my presence among students each year. After the second year, there was even question of expelling me for a harmless card game. We were "caught" by the secretary of the Communist Youth organization.
And in the third year, the dean of our department quite seriously considered the possibility of my transfer to Hrodna. He used the following argumentation: I was from Western Belarus, where the Soviets came to power only in 1939; hence my freethinking and rejection of official ideology.

Career frames

Unfortunately, my university problems were not limited to the transfer to Hrodna, which did not happen. I graduated successfully from the university and had the right to choose where to work.
However, I was sent to work (despite my choice) to the Smolensk region, one of the dilapidated area. And that is an understatement; at that time, convicted criminals worked in some collective farms there.
The rector said that such decision was taken. I replied that in this case, I would go wherever I see fit. He assured me that a prosecutor would find me then. Thus, I came back to my native village. A few days later, I got a job of agronomist in the Soviet farm named after Dzimitrau and three months later, I joined the army. I served in the Strategic Rocket Forces in Tatishchevo, Saratov region. Now this place is often shown in news bulletins: the first "Topol" missiles were deployed there, and then, the first "SS-20" missiles were deployed there, too.
After the discharge (I was the last dischargee as I was not among the best soldiers) I came back to my native Soviet farm. Eight months later, I was appointed chief agronomist in the Soviet farm "Zhabinkauski".
In 1980, the district committee of the Communist Party decided to transfer me to the post of secretary of the Communist Party organization of the collective farm "Luch" in the same district and I became deputy chairman of the farm at the same time. Two years later, after the May plenary meeting, which adopted the Food Program, the posts of heads of agricultural departments were introduced in the district party committees. I was offered this post and I agreed, not without painful hesitations. The process of rapid career growth began. I still have no moral certainty whether it was a coincidence or I was something? Maybe both at the same time.

Two years later, I was appointed instructor of the regional Communist Party committee, and a year later, instructor of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. Less than a year later, I was elected (and everybody knows how the elections were held at that time) First Secretary of the Kletsk district party committee. It was an unprecedented case because you had to wait for such posts for 6 to 8 years. I was only 35 years old.

The party privileges weighed upon me, my colleagues did not understand me. Even when it was impossible to buy normal meat in the official shops, I never used special [nomenklatura] shops; I was disgusted by it.

I worked there until February 1991. I was appointed head of the Agrarian Policy Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus. These were the tumultuous years of the perestroika.

Many of my colleagues can confirm that I was a "black sheep" among them, i.e. I did not act in a conventional way; I was going "against the current". I even supported Gorbachev when he was anathemized. I realized that it was not that a single person who ruined the country and the Party; try and ruin the United States, France, the United Kingdom or Germany. It is simply unthinkable.

In 1996, I was kind of "resurrected" from non-existence and called into the new system of power. This was how it happened: they took the folder with my personal data file from the archives and summarized — he is one of ours. I became first deputy chairman of the Minsk regional executive committee.

They were wrong.



SIARHIEJ KALIAKIN

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I already pointed out that there was nothing unusual in the fact that two congresses of two Communist parties were scheduled to be held on 15 July 2006; especially if we recall what was said by classics. But our conversation with First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus Siarhiej Kaliakin has nothing to do with politics.

Childhood of the Future "Communist Boss"

I was born on 16 June 1952 in Minsk, at 2 Jakub Kolas Alley. At that time, however, that street was called Lahojski Trakt. It was situated in the Kamarouka neighborhood. Then, military stores were there, and the forest began.

My father Ivan was a military builder. After the war, Minsk was partially rebuilt by German prisoners of war; those who fought in the Wehrmacht worked for five years and SS-men worked for ten years. I remember them; they worked on the [main] avenue which has been renamed many times since. There was no Ministry of Housing and Construction at that time yet. Its functions were performed by the Military Works Department which was later reorganized into the 4th Trust. My father managed this trust.

My mother Galina was a former guerilla who served in different agencies. My parents had quite an interesting life story. For each of them it was the second family. My father's wife died in Minsk during a bombardment. His son Anatoli, my elder brother, became a street boy. The father found him in an orphanage just a few years after the war was over.

In 1957, my younger brother Mikhail was born. But my mother's younger brother Valery also lived with us. He was younger than Anatoli, and we thought for a long time that he was also our brother. We figured out the truth only when we grew up.
After the war, everybody lived a modest life. First, we lived in a shared apartment, and then we moved in a one-bedroom apartment in the same apartment house and later to a two-bedroom apartment. My mother and Mikhail live there now.
In 1959, we bought our first TV set, KVN. It had a small screen with a large lens. Neighbors from all over the apartment house came to us to watch television.

Education and Service

I started school in 1959. It was School No. 20 (now it is a gymnasium). There, I studied for three years and then went to School No. 76 which opened in 1961.
The natural sciences — mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy etc. — always came natural to me. I only had problems with languages: in School No. 20 with French and in School No. 76 with German.
I had a difficult period in my studies from the eighth grade to the middle of the ninth. As they say, I lost all desire. I even got "E" grades in some trimesters, and some teachers suggested that I'd rather leave for a vocational or technical school but I did not do it. I also admit that I could not boast of exemplary behavior.
At the end of the second trimester in the ninth grade I broke a leg; I was running around the school and fell on the stairs. My leg was cased in plaster. So, I began to study and review the learned material probably because I was constrained in my movements. And at the end of the grade, I had only two "C" grades — in Russian and German languages. And a year later, I had only one "C", in German.
In 1996 (on 29 May), I broke another leg but at the same place. I was a heavy smoker, and I smoked strong cigarettes, such as *Belomor*. I spent more than a month in the hospital. Naturally, smoking was not allowed in the hospital ward. Since then, I don't smoke for ten years already.
Having graduated from the high school, I decided to enter the Radio Engineering Institute. First, I wanted to go to Moscow but later my classmates and I changed our minds. I passed well the exams in

mathematics (oral and written) and physics; I had to pass an exam in composition. The Russian language was not one of the core subjects and a "C" would be sufficient. I managed to put so many commas that I got an "E" and I was not admitted in the full-time department. I decided to enroll into the part-time department. Incidentally, it was the only university where it was allowed.

I got a job of a laboratory assistant for technical training aids in my school. The most interesting thing was that I got the same marks when applying to the part-time department (and I got the same questions at the oral math exam) but I was more pragmatic at that time in writing the composition. I chose the open topic "My city". I wrote something of this kind: "Morning. The sun rises. The city wakes up". The longest sentence was made of three words. And I was admitted in the first year.

The next summer, I began working as a technician in the automated control systems department in Orgtekhstroy Trust. It was more relevant to my education profile. And in November, I was enlisted in the army. I was very disappointed. It seemed to me that my life was over; when I would take discharge, I would be almost 21 years old. An old man... Now I laugh when I recall this.

I served in the Southern Group of Forces.

We were discharged quite late. I came home on 26 December, on the New Year's Eve. I met my schoolmate Ryhor Tsymanovich who had been enlisted almost at the same time as me and served in the Border Troops. He advised me to come to the university in the evening and convinced me that it made no sense to waste a year. The end-of-semester exams just began. And by the middle of the next year, I was already admitted for exams. So I became a second-year student.

I began working at Integral as a serviceman of hi-tech equipment and I worked there until September 1974.

In 1992, I obtained another university degree; I graduated from the Philosophy and Economics Department of the Belarusian State University.

Party career

In 1983, I was offered the position of an instructor at the administrative and planning department in the Partyzanski district committee of the [Communist] Party. I became secretary of the party committee

of Besselstroy Trust, which still exists. I regret that I was not able to work in the trust for a longer time. I was summoned to the [Minsk] city party committee and told that I should start working there in two days. I did not want to, because my salary would be reduced by about four times. Besides, we just began to settle down. I moved to my new one-bedroom apartment in the "corn cob" building at Viera Kharuzhaja Street in 1981 when I worked in the Republican Headquarters, which collaborated with the Ministry of Construction. I still live there. I was told that material comforts could not be more important than the party work.

A very serious conflict blazed up in the City Party Committee. It was led by Mikalaj Halko at that time. This is what happened then. One of our nomenclature representatives, who held an important position, faced certain problems due to his financial impropriety. The top management tried to sweep this story under the rag. I was careless enough to oppose the management's position and I voiced my opinion. At that time, my career progression was under discussion, and the documents for my appointment as deputy head of the Administrative and Planning Department were ready. The next day after my speech, one of the secretaries Marjan Misuna invited me and told me: you're right, but I see no point in your further work in the City Party Committee as they will take revenge on you here. He offered me to go to work as Deputy Chairman of Savietski City District Executive Committee.

I have only good memories associated with this period. It was very interesting; we really helped people.

Later, I was elected Second Secretary of the Savietski City District Party Committee on competitive basis. (It was in vogue during the perestroika). It helped me to get acquainted with the industrial complex, as I was overseeing many enterprises in our district as a part of my job.

In 1989, I became First Secretary, again on competitive basis. I held this position when the CPSU was dissolved and I became unemployed.

In March 1992, I was elected (from three candidates) as chairman of the Savietski City District Executive Committee at a meeting of the District Council and I worked in this position until Lukashenka came to power.

In December 1991, the Belarusian Party of Communists was created. I was among its founders. I became the head of the party much later, in 1994.

In my opinion, the creation of a "hierarchy" in Belarus was harmful. I told about this at the very first meeting which Lukashenka had with heads of local authorities. A conflict arose. I was invited to Mr. Jarmoshyn who was then the mayor of the capital city. He told me that he had received orders not to work with me and that I would not get into the "hierarchy". The deputies voted in my favor four times at the session until I asked them not to. Then, two positions were under consideration, chairman of the executive committee and chairman of the council. I was then elected to the latter post.
In 1994, the elections to the Supreme Council of the 13th convocation were held. The rest is well known.

P.S. On 29 October 2009, at its 14th extraordinary congress, the Belarusian Communist Party was renamed the Belarusian United Left Party "Fair World".



PAVEL KAZLOUSKI

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The author thought of an interview with Pavel Kazlouski long time ago. And this is not because he once "accelerated" my resignation from the army. In 1994 Pavel Kazlouski became the first Defense Minister in the sovereign Belarus.

"Prussian" background

My life was a little unusually, because of the war. When the war started, by family lived in Valkounia village, Pruzhany district, Brest region, which is in the Belavezhskaya Puscha. My family had its own land and a farmstead. The Germans entered our village very rapidly, as it was only 13 km from the border. We found ourselves in the enemy's rear. All men from the area, including my father Pavel Antonavich, were simply late for the call up to the Red Army. There were five children in the family at that time, then one sister died. The Germans, fearing resistance, burnt down houses in villages close to the border, and took people to work in Eastern Prussia. So, my parents happened to be there. I was born on March 9, 1942.

In 1945, when the front shifted to the German territory already, all men who had not been called up and worked for bauers were right away sent to the front. Literally a month and a half after the call-up, on March 3, 1945 my father perished near Konigsberg and was buried in a mass grave.

I studied in five different schools: primary school in one village, 7-years school – in another etc. At the end of the school age I lived in a village 30 km away from our village, lived in a dormitory and visited home at weekends.

In 1961 I entered the Higher Command Military School in Tashkent. I started military service in Grozny where I'd been sent to after studies. It was calm and peaceful there at that time. Then I was transferred to Ordzhonikidze (now Vladikavkaz) where a general command military school was being organized on the basis of a Suvorov Military School. By the way, I was awarded a medal "For distinguished service" in the School, although I did not fight. Later, my nephew and my son-in-law also studied in the School. From there I went to the Frunze Academy.

After graduation from the Academy in 1974, I became commander of a regiment headquarters in Kalinin (now Tver). In six months I was promoted to commander of a regiment, and became a lieutenant colonel. This is the second military rank that I was promoted to ahead of schedule.

In 1978 I went to Angola as an adviser — the Portuguese troops left it and were replaced by ours and Cuban troops. We taught how to organize a Soviet-type army. Since we were advisors, we did not take part in military actions. The Cubans, though there were five regiments only, were fighting at the beginning. They suffered great losses: unlike the Angolans, they were not lazy. Unfortunately, Cuban casualties were more numerous than of those for whom they fought. Brave people.

I was an adviser for two years. In 1980 I became commander of a division headquarters in Akhaltsikhe (Georgia), the Transcaucasian Military District. Approximately equal number of Armenians and Georgians were living there. Both nationalities treated officers very well. They invited us to their celebrations, as if we were true friends, offered us to drink a wine horn... Try not to drink... Two years later, I became a commander of a division in Yerevan, and then left for the Academy of the General Headquarters, and from there — for my native Belarus.

The First Defense Minister

It happened so that with time I became a young commander of a regiment, a young commander of a division, a young second-in-command of an army. A year and a half afterwards, I became the commander of the army, my predecessor and friend Yury Pavlovich Seleznev was appointed head of the headquarters, and then — the commander of the Leningrad Military District (later he and his wife died in a car crash).

In 1991 I was appointed commander of the Belarusian Military District Headquarters. It was in summer, nearly two months before the creation of the State Committee on the State of Emergency. I happened to go through the hardest time for the military — dissolution of the USSR. The army felt it the sharpest, because the then-famous perestroika politician Gorbachev had already wrong-footed the army in Baku, Tbilisi, Sumqayit etc.
On the first day of the putsch, the USSR Defense Minister Yazov sent a telegram to the district commander Kostenko saying to be ready for to bring troops in the state of highest alert. Nobody could single out definitely what was going on. The question was solved by a council of war. All agreed that nobody would bring tanks to the streets. Kostenko made a very "wise" solution: went somewhere for company drills. He just wanted to be away from the phone line directly linking to the Minister. I was left as a senior officer. On the third day the phone rang. Yazov, rude as usually, asked:
— Where is the commander?
— At the drills.
— What the f... is he doing there?
I did not understand finally why he called.
Then December 8 came. Kostenko and I were at the summing-up session in Moscow, and in the morning we heard on the radio the news about the night meeting in Viskuli. We were astonished: when leaving for Moscow, we had no idea what was going on in our Belavezhskaya Puscha. Yazov was 20 minutes late for our meeting (it never happened before). Although he did not try to explain anything, it was obvious that all the deal approached a collapse.
Somewhere in January next year the Council of Ministers appointed me the head of the commission on developing laws aimed to create our own Armed Forces. There were no hopes for anything common, the "Parade of Sovereignties" started. Russia and Belarus declared about it the latest, nobody offered me to become the Defense Minister of Belarus, although others had talks of the kind.
Nearly at that time Piotr Grigorijevich Chaus became the Minister of Defense, that is a Minister without troops. He was accommodated in the building of the regional military commissariat. Nobody was subordinate to Chaus, as there was also a commander of the district. By the way, when consultations about the first Defense Minister

started, he was also a candidate. I understood that Kostenko could not become the Defense Minister, as he was Russian by nationality, whereas an ethnic Belarusian was needed. Among others, there was Georgi Shpak. The late Artimenya, head of the Hrodna region, who then headed Respublika, the deputies" group in Parliament, invited me to the hotel where he was staying then. He asked why I did not aspire to the position. To tell the truth, I was taken aback by the question. We knew each other pretty well through our work in the Hrodna area, and he did not understand why some people were coming to Shushkevich and Kebich and were telling that I was a muddlehead incapable of being a Minister. If I thought otherwise and gave my consent, he would start "working".

Soon I was invited to Kebich where I repeated my consent. Afterwards, Kostenko invited me and suggested that I refuse. I replied that if we were speaking about him personally, I would have done the way he suggested, but we were talking about Shpak... He did not speak with me for two weeks later.

Everyone supported my candidacy, including the BPF fraction. At the session of the Supreme Council, I was appointed the Defense Minister of the Republic of Belarus by vast majority.

Risk priced at stars on shoulder straps

At first I had nine deputies. Squabbles began, and I started firing them. After the 1994 elections, I resigned together with the government of Kebich, as it must be. I did not work a single day with A.Lukashenko, which I am happy about a lot. Well, he did not offer me cooperation, and he couldn’t because at that time my suit was handled in court.

I still consider that my work in the team of Kebich was correct and I suppose that it was the best choice for that time. Both Gonchar and Bulakhov offered me to change orientation towards the most probable winner, but I refused. I told that I would accompany Kebich till the end, as I saw danger for the country. Yet in March 1994, I sued Lukashenko in court. When speaking to Parliament, he mentioned names of seven corrupt officials, including me. Everyone was going to sue him, but only I did it. Lukashenko saw me in the corridors of Parliament and suggested that I withdraw the suit, otherwise I would regret. I answered I would do it only in case he publicly apologized.

After the victory, before the session of the Supreme Council, Lukashenko invited me, Alexander Iosifovich Tushinski and Nikolay Pavlovich Churkin to have a talk. Sheiman also took part in the talk. We were offered to keep working until new people were appointed. I was informed about a big amount of discrediting evidence against me. I asked to name the evidence, but nothing unlawful was mentioned.

When speaking to the Supreme Council, the president suggested the "zero variant" and my employment. At that time, a panel was held in Kalodzischy headed by the head of the headquarters Churkin, and I came to say goodbye to the team.

If the authorities were wiser and had not appointed Kostenko, who was very probable to take revenge, this might not have happened. Alas, I was right in my fears. Almost everybody at high positions in the Defense Ministry was fired in a moment. I don’t understand what their fault was. They had worked before me, in my presence, and would have been more useful for longer.

After resignation I went to my last furlough, to which I was entitled. Upon return, I was invited to Dolgoliov. I don’t want to say the name and patronymic of the man, though I know it. He told that the wedding of my son and Grib’s daughter had been investigated, and it revealed damage of 28 million rubles. I read and asked if he had verified the written facts, or it might be a typical libel. Among other things, it mentioned that only the tableware beaten cost us almost five million. It would be impossible to do even if we rolled on the tables, we should have beaten it in the boxes. It is a wedding, not "a battle on the ice".

Practically several days later, my sister from Brest phoned me, crying: she heard the presidential edict about the penalty on me. I was the first target of the revenge from the new authority.



ALIAKSANDR KAZULIN

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One of the bloggers made a good point saying that it was the Kazulin-Terminator who was imprisoned and it was the Kazulin-Preacher who was liberated. However, we will not talk about philosophy at all. Kazulin told me about his life. And we only did not talk about prison as a matter of principle.

Sports fighting

I was born on 29 November 1955. My mother Jauhienija Kanstantsinauna was a teacher. My father Uladzislau Aliaksandravich was a foreman at the Minsk Tractor Works.

I passed my childhood in the Traktarazavodski district. Our neighborhood was quite singular in the sense that one could not go out there just like this; the courtyard gangs had their tough rules. The territory was rather large: the neighborhood of the Tractor Works, the blocks near "Motovelo" factory and the famous dance floor, which we called "Stumps" (now, the park named after the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution has been laid out there).

Naturally, we had few amusements at that time, so we passed most of our time outdoors. What hockey rinks? We played hockey right on the pavement, and football matches were held on a suitable clearing. We had our own hierarchy in the courtyards. Usually, one gang was in charge, which established its own arrangements and rules of conduct. And I did not grow up as a very "street" boy. I never smoked and I was not attracted to alcohol. As in such circumstances it was necessary to have strong fists, I had to start practicing sports a lot.

In the fourth grade, I fell for volleyball. At that time, coaches worked "selectively", and they used to come to schools directly from sports clubs. Eventually, I joined the semi-professional team "Tractor". Later, because of the street circumstances, I switched to sambo [unarmed self-defense]. (I think everybody understands what is meant under "street circumstances".)

Sambo helped me to solve all "street" problems and eventually nobody bothered me anymore. I received the first adult grade and even became member of the Belarusian national team. I was engaged in sambo until I was drafted into the army, and during last years, I practiced its combat variety.

In the eighth grade, I broke an ankle. The grips and sleights in the combat sambo are known to be more rigid, and also I exercised with those who were 5 or 6 years older than me because I was physically strong. Naturally, older guys had more experience and skills to avoid injury. And in the tenth grade, I broke a collarbone.

At that time, the intelligence service was in vogue: everybody wanted to become a Stierlitz, and I was not an exception (I was attracted by romanticism). When another round of selection to the military schools was held, I said about it directly. They offered me to go to Krasnodar. I came to Krasnodar in my most elegant Crimplene suit (it cost a fortune at that time) but nobody was impressed: you get a mop and start mopping. Fortunately, I played chess well, so I moved pieces more often than worked as a floor polisher during my enrollment month.

I passed all exams with the "A" mark. At the meeting of the enrollment commission, the commander of the school, a Lieutenant General, congratulated me on my admission and asked me whether I knew where I was enrolling to. It turned out that the school was specializing in government communication, so this was not the intelligence. But it was very prestigious: five candidates for one position, all postings were at least in the Army's headquarters.

I was given two days to decide. This is what I thought: as it was not what I dreamt of, I got to a wrong place. So I went back to Minsk. It was the first such case during the entire history of the school.

Army fighting

After I came to Minsk, I went to the yellow building on the [main] avenue which has been constantly renamed lately, i.e. the KGB. But I

was also told there that the intelligence was not in their profile.

Then, I went to the Mechanics and Mathematics Department at the Belarusian State University. First, they promised to recognize my marks from the military school but at the end I had to pass all exams. I received one unfortunate "B" mark and got a so called semi-passing score. The door to the daytime department was closed; I was admitted to the part-time department and... went to the military enlistment office where I asked to send me in the Marines. My mom was crying but I thought I had to choose the most elite troops. At the same time, I worked as a laboratory assistant at a school's physics classroom.

I was drafted in May 1974. First, I was sent to Pionersk, at a boot camp of the Baltic Fleet's Marine, and then to Baltiysk (Pilau at that time).

After the boot camp, I became a sergeant, naturally. I led one of the units of the sea-borne assault. We had to learn everything: to steer amphibian tanks and infantry combat vehicles, and to shoot all kind of weapons. The combat duty (expeditions) lasted nine months. As paratroopers get award pins for the number of jumps, the marines are awarded with pins "For Seagoing".

At that time, there was confrontation between the US 11th Navy and the Soviet Navy. We sailed on a large landing ship. It was a ship of very impressive dimensions — about 150 meters in length and about 50 meters in width, and as high as a five-story building. (To make it easier to imagine the size of our "box", it is enough to say that we were playing volleyball and swimming in the pool.) The crew and the marines were stationed there at the same time — about one thousand men altogether. The entire Baltic Fleet had just a few such ships.

Our base was in Conakry, Guinea. Apart from Guinea, we sailed to Nigeria, Congo and Angola (a civil war began just at that time there). I remember how we responded to alarm. We went from Baltiysk to Sebastopol by train; there we boarded ships and sailed to Angola: through Bosporus, the Dardanelles into the Atlantic Ocean and then to the shores of Africa.

As we served in difficult conditions, we had a "siesta" from 12.30 to 16.00; it was impossible to do anything at +50 degrees Celsius in the shade.

It is August. Sometimes, you keep the watch at night dressed in navy shorts, a light jacket and sandals and you feel cold. You come to the thermometer and see +35 degrees there. It is cool compared to the midday heat.

But these were peanuts; the whole experience was great. No wonder they say that those who have not seen the sea do not understand what it is. It is indescribable beauty when the sun is rising or setting — just like in a fairy tale! You notice it especially at equator. And so many living creatures: dolphins and whales, and flying fish. Sometimes we caught fish on an empty hook. Water was very clean; you could see everything at 40 or 50 meters.

Sometimes, the commander gives the order: "Stop the classes; everybody comes to the board and watches the whales!" Big and small whales were fantastic! Especially at that time. Very big killer whales of 10 to 15 meters long always accompanied ships. A few times we even caught sharks: we put very thick (as an arm) wire cable in water with a big piece of meat attached. We dragged a white shark and a hammer-head to the ramp. They were incredibly tenacious. Imagine: we removed all entrails through the jaws with a gaff, and several hours later, a sub-officer almost got hurt. He tried to touch, the jaws snapped and the gaff was cut in half. You would never see such things ashore.

Guinea is an amazing country. Women go out there naked to the waist. And we were young boys after all... Every time when we were marching, the commanding officer was giving the order to have eyes to the opposite side.

When ships cross the equator, there is the feast of Neptune. Usually we had different competitions but wrestling was the most important one. Naturally, different weight categories were identified but the most prestigious one was the one without any restrictions. I participated in that one. At that time, I weighed 76 kg only. There were a lot of participants, and in order to reach the final, I had to beat about a dozen people. In the final, my opponent weighed 130 kg. It was very difficult to make any sleight against such a bulk; it was difficult just to lift him. But I still managed to hip him and became a champion. So, my school practice in sambo helped there.

Everyday fighting

I left military service in May 1976. I had a few months left until my studies began, so I went to work in the forging shop of the Tractor Works.

I got the highest grades, as it was at the part-time department. When I graduated from the university, I went to a post-graduate school,

though I was offered to have a career in the Communist Youth League. I preferred to get a profession but I was not able to avoid being engaged in public activities. In the second year of the post-graduate school, I was asked to lead the university's Communist Youth committee. I had to be transferred from the daytime department to the correspondence department. Naturally, the defense of my thesis had to be postponed.

After working as a secretary of the Communist Youth committee at the Belarusian State University I was offered very high positions in the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Youth League, up to the secretary.

I got married during my studies at the university. It happened on 25 November 1978. Iryna was a third-year student and I was in my fourth year of studies. We met in a very interesting way. Iryna was on duty in the Communist Youth committee. The duty service ended at 4 pm but I asked her to overstay a bit. I came back at nearly seven o'clock and I was very surprised that she was still waiting. That's what it means to keep one's word! I noticed her right then. And in general, the marriages between students are the most sincere, in my opinion.

Volha was born when we were still students, on 15 February 1980. In the same year, I graduated from the BSU, and my wife graduated in 1981. She never used any sabbatical leave.

The student years are the most cheerful in one's life.

I defended my thesis in November 1987, and it was confirmed in February 1988. By that time, we had another daughter, Julia.

It happened that Mikalaj Dziamchuk who was secretary of the [Communist] Party committee at the university when I was in charge of the BSU's Communist Youth was appointed Minister of Education. Three ministries were merged: Ministry of Higher and Vocational Education, the State Committee for Professional Education and the Ministry of Public Instruction. Dziamchuk offered me to become his assistant and head of department. It turned out, however, that he was not able to pay the wages I earned in the university: I earned 530 rubles a month in the BSU, and he was able to pay 350 rubles maximum. So, I lost quite a lot at this transfer but money was never the most important thing in my life. I wanted to do something very good because education affects literally everything.

After having served as Minister of Education, Dziamchuk was appointed Deputy Prime Minister. Viachaslau Kiebich offered me the

position of the Minister of Education. And this was in my 34 years of age! I was likely to be appointed but I was not confirmed by the Parliamentary Commission on Education, Culture and Historical Heritage. The thing was that I spoke a mixture of the Belarusian and Russian languages and I did not have good control of the Belarusian language. The commission believed that it was unacceptable for a minister of education. And I became Deputy Minister and later First Deputy Minister. I was in charge of long-term development matters, analytics and financial issues.

In December 1995, I defended my doctoral thesis.

In August 1996, I became President of the Belarusian State University.

In 1999, it became clear to me that Lukashenka was not leading us towards a brighter future but to serious disasters and very naughty manifestations of the past. There are people who can adapt to any situations and circumstances but I am not one of them.

Many things used to happen in my life in November.

Another Student Day was celebrated on 17 November 2003. I was on holiday then but I still decided to attend the traditional annual meeting with students. It turned out that I was already on the wanted list because I had allegedly stolen some gold — as much as five kilos. I called calmly those who were looking for me, congratulated Zhadobin who is now State Secretary on his 50th birthday, and visited Minister Radzkou: look, I'm not hiding.

At the moment when I was heading directly to the meeting, Radzkou called me and said that I was summoned urgently to the President. I said that I could not cancel anything. The minister pointed out that I was aggravating my situation and that he was not convinced by my point about 600 people who were waiting for me. Then, I asked him to tell the President that I could not do anything. But Radzkou insisted on having a meeting. I agreed then to suspend my session of questions and answers with students for 10 minutes. It was during this pause that he announced that a decree had been signed on my dismissal. It was not a surprise for me. I came back and continued to answer questions. However, 15 minutes later, a student saw information online that I had been fired from the post of the University's President. The entire audience laughed; they thought it was a joke. But I confirmed that the decree had indeed been signed.

ULADZIMIR NIAKLIAJEU



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On 9 July 2006, Uladzimir Niakliajeu, a renowned Belarusian poet, celebrated his 60th birthday. Naturally, he wrote the story of his life himself. As a matter of principle, I never write essays about writers and poets because I believe that nobody would do it better than they themselves.

Between a gun and an icon

Long ago, a British king, having become old and tired, decided to shrug the burden of power from his shoulders and split the kingdom in three parts between his three daughters, but he deprived one of them, Cordelia, of her share at the last moment. Thanks to the genius of Shakespeare's fantasies, the whole world knows what happened next...

The real story of Gediminas, the ruler of the Great Duchy of Lithuania, who, having become old, decided to share the richest towns of his country among his sons is much less known to the world than the invented story of King Lear, the ruler of Britain. The grand duke deprived two of his seven sons including Algirdas.

After Gediminas died, Algirdas who inherited Kreva waged a war against his brother Jaunutis, took away his inherited grand duke's crown from him and became grand duke himself with help from his other brother, Kestutis.

Almost forty years later, Kestutis would help his nephew Jogaila, Algirdas" son, to become grand duke, and Jogaila, in "gratitude", would order to have him murdered in the corner tower of the Kreva castle. Moreover, Jogaila would also order to kill his cousin Vytautas, Kestutis"

son, in Kreva. Vytautas would be saved by a woman who would die in his stead...

Intensity of human passion that raged in the Kreva castle was as strong as in Shakespeare's tragedies. Tangled paths and trails of our history were tied up in a knot and intertwined for centuries in Kreva.

My childhood passed under the remnants of the castle's walls and on the ruins of our history. This was where I became Belarusian. Ethnicity is not a record in a passport but language, history and culture, which you belong to. Although my father Prokop Mikailovich Neklyaev was a Russian man in everything (he was born on the Volga) with aspirations as immense as the Volga's plain) and a spontaneous and unbridled, to the very end, temper. At war, he was even buried in a grave, badly wounded and shell-shocked, but he survived even in the grave. In 1945, when he finished fighting, they did not let him go back to the Volga but sent him to Western Belarus. Here, fate connected him with my mother, so I am, in some way, an outcome of the war, and this was why I wrote in one of my first poems: "*Clash of nations and peoples was deciding whether I would exist or I wouldn't..."*.

My mother Nastassia Ivanauna Mahier was an arduous worker and a quiet believer. While I remember my father with a gun in his hand that he used for shooting at all directions whenever something was not to his taste, I remember my mother with the Holy Scripture and a prayer before an icon: "Lord, forgive him, my husband who you have given to me..."

So I grew up, so my childhood passed between a gun and an icon. Almost everything I have written comes from there.

"Your eyes will now become mine"

I learned to read when I was about five, and not with a primer but the Bible. My grandfather Jas — Ivan Markavich Mahier — who is still remembered as a saint in Kreva, lost his sight and was no longer able to see the letters of the Holy Scripture. "Your eyes will now become mine", he said one day and began teaching me how to read. For the names of letters we had *A*pple, *B*lackberry, *C*arrot, *D*uck, *E*gg, *F*rog, *G*arlic, and *H*en. They were "growing" in the garden and mooing and grunting in the barn. An every night, stammering both from inability and effort to comprehend somehow what was written there, I read to my grandfather: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God".

Not being too fond of the Soviets, which dispossessed him as a kulak, confiscated his forest, sawmill and almost made him a beggar, my grandfather Jas was hiding a Soviet officer, who was a Jew and a political officer, in his house during the war. He found him, all covered in blood, in a pit where he kept potatoes. He said to his wife, daughter and three sons: "God sent us a man so that we save him..." If the Germans knew about it, they would have hanged them immediately for this.

(When the grandfather died, he sent me a proof of God's existence from the next world. Years after, I wrote about it in the parable "A Bumblebee and a Wanderer" dedicated to Vasil Bykau.)

I started school in Kreva, and from the second grade, I studied in Smarhon. After the seventh grade, I wanted to become a geologist: travel, tents, campfire, and a guitar — it was romantic. I was fourteen years old when I went to Kyiv to study geology where I fell in love dramatically. She was blonde and clear-eyed... I don't recall her name but I remember how I was beaten because of her by five boys who were also in love with her and who lived in the same dormitory room with me. They were older than me, having already served in the army; they used to swaddle me in a blanket and beat me with their keds! So that I fell out of love... I was no match for them and my principles did not let me complain. I held on like grim death. Once, I started coughing and saw blood on my handkerchief. Well, I reckoned, romance is romance, love is love, but life was more important. Good bye, blonde! Moreover, I passed my exams poorly as I was not in the mood for them. The trail to becoming a geologist did not open for me. It was not on my cards.

Two years later, I went to Minsk to study to be an electronics technician, without becoming a veterinarian as my father wanted or a musician as my mother wished. Even though she talked my father into selling our cow and buying me an accordion.

But I did not become an electronics technician either. I was not able to comprehend the laws, which move the current through a circuit. After the third year, I came back and said: "That's it. It's not mine". The mother began crying: "Son, please finish your studies at least somewhere; people think that you are kicked out from everywhere. I can't go out..."

So that my mother could go out, I went back to finish my studies. But how can you study when you don't understand what science you're learning?

Before the winter exams, I bought a book by Albert Einstein without even knowing why. And then I read there how Einstein admitted: so, everybody says I'm a genius, I came up with the relativity theory and other things but, to say the truth, I still don't know why the electric bulb is alight.

I put a bookmark in the book and I go to pass the exam for the major subject. It was a gray winter dawn, and the bulbs are lit in the auditorium. I take the examination card and I return it to the professor without even reading the questions in it. I say, I'm an odd man in your school, you will now give me a low grade, I will be kicked out and it will be fair. However, please explain to me, before I go, why the electric light is alight so that I take at least something useful from this school. The professor goes on to tell me how one electron pushes another and the latter pushes the third one and so on. I listen attentively and nod my head. I thank him for his explanation and put an open book of Einstein in front of him on my record book — like saying, you didn't know it.

The professor's last name was Dubko [oak] but oak he was not. He was a graduate of the renowned Bauman Institute; he appreciated my performance as we would call it today and allowed me to graduate from the electronics vocational school.

With the diploma of a recent graduate I ended up in the Far East and later in Siberia and in the North. Nothing can be compared with these universities of mine; even if they were short, they were intense. Anyway, neither pedagogical nor literary universities could be compared with them; I graduated from one of them but not the other.

Why the electric bulb is alight

My first book should have appeared in Russian when I studied in the Literary Institute. It did not see the light of the day: I took the manuscript back from the Moscow publishing house Young Guard. They looked at me there like I was crazy but I knew what I was doing: the publishing house Mastatskaja Litaratura promised me to publish my Belarusian poetry. I never doubted my choice.

I came from Moscow to Minsk to sign the contract, and I was shown a negative (so-called closed) four-page review. The back page of the last sheet had spots from fat, with traces of knife and smelled onion — they drank and ate on a newspaper which was spread on the editorial desk

with whatever they found available put under the newspaper in order not to cut the table.

At that time, I saw poetry as a temple, and what happened was to me like cursing in the temple. Not the review itself, which its author, as he admitted later, was forced to write but the way in which the temple's servants treated it, me and the temple itself. I was ready to begin hating the whole Belarusian literature...

Finally, the book was published, albeit with a modified title (the one the publishing house gave it, not mine). It was published, first of all, with Baradulin's help who got involved the "big guns", Kuliashou and Panchanka, who were National Poets with influence and power.

One day, I browsed my first book and tried to understand: what could cause any problems with this poetry? I never understood.

I still do not understand many things, and this is why I am writing, writing and writing books. Because only by writing books (and through engagement in arts in general) and also through God (through faith) one can understand something in this world and come a little closer to comprehending the reason why you are wriggling in this life.

If one says that there is no and there can't be any result coming from this wriggling, it will be true but somewhat too much absolute and cosmic truth, beyond comprehension. This is possibly why we saw, cut and break this inconceivable truth into smaller, small and tiny pieces of truth, their own for everybody. One would think that some kind of big truth must have shaped up from those pieces, albeit small but infinite in their number, but it never shapes up... Or, suddenly for each and every one, having suddenly shaped up once, it breaks into pieces again. Because a picture composed from cubes cannot be true. This is more so because everybody knows: there are fragments of different pictures at each side of the cube.

Yet, it was the art that managed to sketch the outlines of the world in more or less true fashion; the world where there is no single truth for all. And above all, it was the literature that managed to do this, which is not interested in why the electric bulb is alight. The literature, in which I began, the Soviet imperial literature, is over. It sank like *Titanic.* The fate of those who disappeared in the ocean together with the ship was tragic. But isn't the fate of those who remained on the shore worse, because it is lonely? We read poetry in stadiums, we were published in magazines with circulation of millions of copies, and millions wanted to be like us, poets. Who do they want to be like today?..

The paradoxical truth is that in the stadiums and the magazines, we did everything to deprive ourselves of stadiums and magazines. Today, literature is not bigger but it is also not smaller than it is, and it occupies the place it should occupy. One can get used to it if he or she writes and writes and not recalls and recalls...

One thing is to think and another thing is to do

"If you are not engaged in politics, politics will engage you..." Speaking of me, politics engaged me (tightly, so that I can feel) in mid-seventies.

Another congress of the CPSU was approaching. I was summoned to Moscow to the Central Committee of the Communist Youth: "You have been chosen from all poets of the Soviet Union to write a welcoming address to the congress from the Soviet youth".

It was not appropriate to ask "Why me?" "Thank you for this honor". Indeed, one of all. I wrote and went back to Minsk. I was summoned back a month later: "You poetry was approved in the Central Committee of the CPSU. You have been chosen from many to read it from the rostrum of the congress".

Four years remained till the end of the era of Brezhnev who was decorated with medals and jokes. Gorbachev was already Secretary of the Central Committee. A ghost of what was later called "perestroika" was already wandering in society, not noticeable to everyone. And at that time, I had to read nationwide "Sail, my country, an icebreaker of the era!"

I understood everything. Few poets would want to drink with me. Later, the same poets, still drinking, asked: "Why did you not refuse?" But go and stand in the middle of an immense cabinet of the Central Committee's Secretary for ideology and refuse. Only before doing so, ask to put you into a mental institution with lax regime where you would be at least allowed to write.

Endless rehearsals began on radio, television and in the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. All over, there were KGB agents, heads of the Central Committee's departments and offices (about one hundred people were responsible for everything). I was reading about the icebreaker for the umpteenth time and I was thinking for the umpteenth time...

Life gives everybody a chance to win: one can win money and another one can win fate. When the chance is big, it normally comes once, but many people, thinking that this is not their last chance, let it pass.

My chance looked like fate. And, thinking for the umpteenth time, I decided not to let it pass and to speak not about the country that sails but the country that sinks. I figured: I was not likely to be put to death — it was not Stalin's era anymore. Certainly, they would put me to jail but the chance was worth it ...

However, one thing was to think and quite another was to do. I was not able to. At the last moment, I did not find strength and courage. And not only because they let me come on the stage in the Kremlin, which was surrounded by three rows of security, not at the appointed time but one hour and a half later as though they suspected something. And not because they told me in advance that I should not get nervous while reading as they would run the recording made at Shabolovka. What difference would it make if they hear me or not? I simply was not able to, I didn't have heart. I read: "Sail, my country, an icebreaker of the era!" And Brezhnev, Suslov and Gorbachev applauded halfheartedly...

I was not then (and I did not even think I ever would be) a dissident; I was not going to speak (a Belarusian Soviet poet) against the Soviet regime. I was not satisfied with some specific persons within it and, therefore, their actions. This motivation was not sufficient to make me do, with calculation and planning, what only obsessed people were able to do.

It is too late to regret it but it is not too late to admit it, even though there is no need in it. Unless it is the only means to explain one of the reasons, not entirely clear even to people close to me, why our relationship with Lukashenka did not work out. I could not allow that what happened to me once on the imperial stage of the Soviet Union would repeat itself as a farce half a lifetime later on the local stage. While on the Kremlin stage, certainly, it was not a high tragedy but still...

God did not let me sin before Kreva

Hardly anyone ever heard me complaining about my life. It cracked a couple of times but so what? My parents lived a much harder life without complaining. And my mother, when praying, never asked God about anything. She only thanked and thanked...

In my book "Yes", which was written in Poland and Finland, where I did not really want to stay, I put on the cover some lines from the poem "A Bed for a Bee", the most Belarusian of all poems I wrote:

...Mother whitens as death,
Mother says: "Don't ask.
Not a small piece of whatever,
Belongs it to you or others,
However unfortunate you are,
Do not ask God for anything —
He already gave you everything...

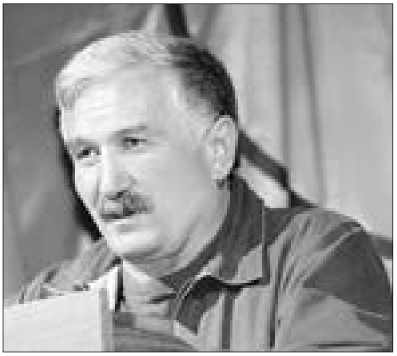
This poem is dedicated to my mother. In the same book, there are dedication to women I loved. They are heavenly women. I am not worth a single one of them.

In addition to love, family and friends, God gave me an occupation I like — poetry. Although, for a long time, judging myself rather harshly and not trusting myself ("As though I entered without a ticket to a place where they ask for tickets..."), I did not trust God — what if He was wrong? And only after my third or fourth book, or even after the fifth one, after "Holy Place", I thought that probably no mistake was made in heaven. Or even if it was, it was a small one. One which can be rectified on earth.

... I made several attempts (forgive me, Lord!) to end it all. God did not let me do it. He did not let me sin before Kreva, before my ancestors, my mother and, in the first place, before Him. So that I finally understand:

In everything that exists, existed and will exist —
It could happen that you wouldn't be in anything.
All wonders are in the single miracle:
In the incredible miracle of
Life.

ALIAKSANDR SASNOU



Prepared for publication on 9.10.2006

I do not want to draw any parallels and compare Aliaksandr Sasnou to any of now serving ministers. It is not the point. The man voluntarily relinquished power, which is not an easy thing to do. The young generation says "Props and kudos" in such cases.

Home grounds

I was born in the first half of the last century or, more exactly, on 14 August 1947 in the village of Tsitsienki near Krasnaje (at that time, it was at the outskirts of Homiel).

My father Viktar Paulavich served in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He did not stay in Homiel for a long time; soon, he was transferred to Dobrush and then to Orsha. The only thing I remember from that period (I was three years old) was how I was carried on a bridge over some river. Later, I tried to find out from my mother Volha Piatrouna where it had happened. She said that the river was only in Orsha. From there, my father was transferred to Siberia, to the Bratsk district in the Irkutsk region.

In 1951, my sister Natalia was born. Now, the Bratsk Sea is above the place where she was born, i.e. the water reservoir of the Bratsk hydroelectric power plant. The sister says that she was born at the bottom of a sea...

There, I went to school and completed six grades.

My father served in the HQ till 1960 when, at Khrushchev's order, over one million people were transferred to the reserve. My father was recognized as a disabled person of the third degree; he was discharged in the rank of Captain and was free to go wherever he wanted to. Later,

he was classified in the second group and then in the first. In 1944, somewhere in the Baltic region, my father was wounded in the head. Perhaps, it was the cause of the glaucoma that he developed after he became 60, and he did not see anything during the last five years of his life.

We came back to Homiel where I went to the seventh grade of the secondary school No. 25. I got "A" and "B" grades mostly, everything came easy to me. In between, I'd like to note that the level of my "Siberian" knowledge was much above the equivalent performance in Homiel. In the seventh grade, I felt so at ease that I simply ignored many things, I admit. I was bored during the classes; I always had clashes with teachers and was overly curious.

Later, I entered the mechanical department of the Homiel Road-Building College. It was much more interesting to study there. We were all boys, almost fifty persons, divided in two groups. We were treated almost as adults. We were paid a stipend. During the first year, I got 14 rubles (it was already after the monetary reform as I started my studies in 1962).

In 1966, I graduated from the college and joined the Army (I defended my graduation thesis on 24 December, and on 28 December my military service already began). I served in Belarus, near Minsk, first at a communications company, and later, already in the rank of sergeant, in a training battalion for mechanics.

I served until May 1969, for two years and a half. Our draft turned out to be a transitional one: after us, people served during two years and before us, during three years.

In 1970, I entered the full-time course of the Economics Department of the Homiel University. Earlier, I graduated from the college with honors, so for entering the university I needed to pass only one exam — a written exam in mathematics — with the "A" mark, which I did.

In my first year at the university, I was elected secretary of the Communist Youth branch of the department. The Economics Department was small at that time as it was established a year before I entered it, but already by my fifth year there, it became one of the largest in the university.

I got married during my studies in the university. My wife name is Volha. We studied in the same group (she joined us from the second year). It was love at first sight.

I graduated from the university with honors, and I stayed as an assistant in the sub-department where I studied. I entered the post-graduate school, began working on my PhD thesis which I defended in 1982 in Sankt-Petersburg in the University of Finance and Economics named after N. Voznesenski.
In 1983, I was appointed senior lecturer of the Sub-department of management, economics and manufacturing process management of the Homiel Polytechnic Institute (now the Polytechnic University named after P. Sukhi) on competitive basis.
In 1984, the head of our sub-department resigned and I was appointed as acting head; a year later, I was already the full-fledged head of the sub-department. The sub-department was the largest in the university; it was in charge of graduation of students in two economic professions and teaching economics to all areas of concentration of the full-time and part-time courses of the university.

A "Front activist" who was never a member of the Belarusian Popular Front

I became engaged in politics in 1989. First, there were the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In Homiel, there were two constituencies, the national one and the territorial one. In one of them, the competition was between now well-known Viktar Karniajenka and Yury Varozhantsau, and in the other one, as it was then customary, between two workers, probably, decent people. Then, for the first time ever, they all were given an opportunity to speak on television. It ruined the workers who, to tell the truth, were not able to put two words together. Against the background of Karniajenka and Varozhantsau, these two guys did not have a single chance because the stormy era was coming, and they had nothing to do in the national parliament with their working-class experience as the only equipment. As a result, they both failed due to poor voter turnout. The same happened to Karniajenka and Varozhantsau but in this case because of too intense struggle between them: they lambasted one another on all counts. The re-elections were set, and my colleagues and friends talked me into taking part in them.
This is how I became Viktar Karniajenka's competitor (he was re-nominated). And Varozhantsau became a candidate in the constituency where these two workers had run. Quite naturally, they won the elections as their popularity in the city was very high.

I did not gain this experience in vain. In spring 1990, when the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian SSR were called, my colleagues and friends talked me again into running. I was nominated by one of the shops of the Machine Components Factory.

The election campaign was tempestuous. I was able to win by a small margin.

The first session of the newly elected parliament opened on 15 May 1990. Struggle began between us and so called partocrats who made almost 90%: directors of factories, chairmen of collective farms, secretaries of the Communist Party district committees, functionaries of different levels, chief doctors, directors of schools, etc. Plus the loyal party activists as the deputies-delegates — 50 persons from war veterans and 50 persons from disabled persons who had been appointed at the meetings of their respective organizations.

The party and government nomenklatura and opposition fought over allocation of posts of chairpersons of the parliamentary commissions. Opposition offered one of such posts to me. Surprisingly, the parliamentary majority agreed. Thus, I became Chairman of the Commission on Labor, Prices, Employment and Social Protection and member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.

I worked as chairman of the commission until autumn 1994 and in the spring, the presidential campaign started. I was in Zianon Pazniak's team.

With Pazniak, we traveled throughout the entire country. Usually, I used to speak first in Russian, smash the government's economic policy, and show absurdity of the Soviet economic and social models. Then, Zianon Pazniak presented his program in Belarusian. We managed quite well. But Aliaksandr Lukashenka won. People wanted populism and they got it.

Soon, I was called by Siarhiej Linh who was Acting Deputy Prime Minister and he offered me to become Minister of Labor. Later, I learned that my candidature was suggested by Lieanid Sinitsyn, Head of the Presidential Administration at that time.

I asked the opinion of the "shadow" government whose member I was. Zianon Pazniak spoke against it but Uladzimir Zablotski, the "shadow" prime minister, was in favor. He believed that the country needed people who had taken all steps of the job ladder. I was of the same opinion then.

I was summoned to Lukashenka who said that he was aware of my work with Pazniak but time came to forget about politics and to take care of economy. I gave my consent but put three conditions. First: we build a market economy in an independent country. Second: no decision must be taken without my consent on the issues that were in my competence. Third: if I do not agree with anything, I will go, and they will let me go immediately.

Lukashenka agreed to everything and signed the decree on my appointment in my presence.

A few months later, I realized that the conditions were not respected.

Later, it made me to give up the ministerial post. And then preparations to the notorious 1996 referendum started. Each minister got some regions "allocated" to him. The Homiel district was allocated to me. I went there and saw that large-scale preparations were under way to "produce" required results. I understood that I had to leave my post.

Two days before the referendum, one of my deputies told me that Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir resigned because of the referendum. I immediately arranged a meeting with him where he told me (he wrote on a piece of paper as he realized that his office was bugged) that all members of the presidium of the government and all leading ministers would resign with him. I asked why he was so sure. It turned out that it was discussed at a meeting in his office. A naive person... He was too honest. I said that nobody would leave but me. We separated at that.

A new landmark

It can be regarded as new only partially. Already in 1992, I became one of the founders of the Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS).

I was invited to work in the IISEPS in autumn 1998. I worked there as deputy director until the Institute was closed down in 2005.

Now, as the Institute has been "squeezed out" of the country (it is registered in Lithuania), the authorities are going to reinstall the Soviet rules and norms of sociological studies. Permits will be needed for everything, and naturally, the independent researchers will not be able to get them.


МЫ ПРОТИВ

FROM THE BOOK
"ARRHYTHMIA, OR CODE OF RESISTANCE"

SIARHIEJ ANTUSIEVICH



Prepared for publication on 16.05.2012

When I was talking to Siarhiej Antusievich the first time several years ago, I was impressed that he was one of the first people in Belarus to buy a GPS navigation device. Now I realise that it was only logical, as Siarhiej Antusievich has been keen on modern technologies since childhood. In life, however, he is guided by a different navigation system — Freedom.

The First Landmarks

Siarhiej Antusievich was born on 16 August 1973 in Brest.

When his mother Galina remembers that day she always thinks of unbearable thirst and the premiere of the extremely popular Soviet TV series *The Seventeen Seconds of Spring*. Its songs could be heard from every window.

His father Jauhien worked for an electro-mechanical plant in Brest. Then he was called up and did military service in signal troops in Latvia, where he signed up for extended service. He was soon transferred to Hrodna and then to Afghanistan as an advisor.

The advisors were allowed to take their families with them to Afghanistan, as they lived under strong security protection in a relatively quiet atmosphere of the first years after the Soviet troops had entered Afghanistan. Siarhiej finished his sixth form in Hrodna but from 1987 he studied in Kabul.

By the way, Mohammad Najibullah, who went on to become the President of Afghanistan, lived in a house nearby, but what Siarhiej remembered most had nothing to do with him. He remembered books.

In the Soviet times they were always in short supply. To buy a really popular book, common people had to deliver twenty kilos of scrap paper to be recycled and get a card which entitled you to the book.
In Kabul books could be bought easily. Soviet publishers were very efficient in supplying "the limited contingent of Soviet troops" with books. They always made up more than a half of the family's luggage.

Technologies as a Landmark

When the family came back from Afghanistan, Siarhiej Antusievich again went to School No. 5 in Hrodna. After finishing school he tried to get admission to Brest Technical University but failed.
Our priorities normally change as we grow older. At first Siarhiej Antusievich had wanted to choose biology and agriculture as a profession. He enjoyed planting seeds and watching them grow.
Later on he had taken an interest in history. Then came what they call new technologies.
Azot chemical plant in Hrodna subsidised the school. When Siarhiej Antusievich was in his ninth form they gave the school a PC produced by the German company Schneider.
From that moment on modern technologies became a top priority for Siarhiej and he decided this would be his profession.
After his failure at the admission exams Siarhiej went back to his school to work as a laboratory assistant in the physics lab. Later on he would be a people's deputy together with the headmaster of his school.
A year of work as a lab assistant allowed him to prepare for the exams so well that the next year he was admitted to two universities at once. The thing is that he applied for the correspondence course to the Faculty of Maths of Hrodna University and for full-time study to the Belarusian Technological Institute, where he was going to obtain a profession of an engineer for chemical industry.

Politics as a Landmark

Like most students, Siarhiej Antusievich had to begin his studies by helping at a collective farm, but instead of the tradition potatoes he spent a fortnight picking up flax.
It was in 1991, when Belarus had just proclaimed it sovereignty. Large-scale rallies with white-red-white flags certainly had an

impact on the future union activist's outlook. Besides, when he was still at school, the father of one of his classmates belonged to the BPF, so in his case the soil for political dissent had already been ploughed.

It was only natural that the first thing Siarhiej Antusievich did after being assigned to work for Azot upon graduation was to join the BPF, or, to be more precise, its youth branch, which he created and became its deputy chairperson.

It was in the Hrodna branch of the Young Front that he met his wife Žana, who joined it in the beginning of 1998. They got married in November the same year.

By the way, Siarhiej Antusievich for years belonged to the BPF Council and stood for all the elections as its member. This shows that membership in an opposition party castigated by the regime is not an obstacle to winning. What matters is not the colours of the flag under which you fight but support of common voters.

To tell the truth, like many others, I am sick and tired of the split-ups in the opposition. It looks like they are struggling against each other more than against "Europe's last dictator". Maybe this is the reason why it has invariably low support in the society.

Independent Unions as a Landmark

In the 1990s it was much easier for independent unions to get registration than it is nowadays. By the time Siarhiej Antusievich joined an officially registered independent union at *Azot* in 1999, it had existed for seven years.

By the way, upon his graduation in 1996 Siarhiej Antusievich was assigned to work for *Azot*, as the plant had recommended him for studying at university and guaranteed him a job when he had got a degree.

At first he worked as a fitter for a year, as there were no vacancies for engineers. He is still happy to have had that experience, because he was able to see how things worked and understand the reasoning of people who earned their living by doing manual labour. This is not something you can learn at university, but it is undoubtedly very valuable experience.

Very soon after Siarhiej Antusievich joined the independent union he was asked to take on education and training programmes. This

field is very important because of the continual changes in the labour legislation.

Six months later he was asked to become the head of the union.

In 2007 at the seventh convention of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union Siarhiej Antusievich was elected its treasurer. (This organisation is the largest branch of the Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, led by Alaksandr Jarašuk.)

Siarhiej Antusievich served as the treasurer until April 2011, when he was elected Deputy Chairperson of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union. He held the position for less than a year, as on 31 January 2012 he was elected Deputy Chairperson of the Congress of Democratic Trade Unions.

We have all heard more than once about strong pressure on the members of independent trade unions, which cannot but make you feel sorry for them. *Azot* is no exception here. Its employees" contracts com up for renewal every year, they have to go through periodic recertification, etc. The administration does not miss a chance to use these opportunities to their advantage.

When Siarhiej Antusievich started off there, the independent union had about 900 members. Nowadays there are a bit more than a hundred left. Some people might find the figures quite discouraging, but I am pleased to see that in spite of the large-scale purges, when people are forced to choose between their ideals and a job that allows them to earn a living, so far the regime has not achieved a "scorched-earth effect".

Landmarks for the Future

When it was announced in 2002 that local elections would be held the next year, Siarhiej Antusievich decided to stand for the local council. None of his close associates contradicted.

His constituency was not very big — only seven thousand voters who mainly lived in employees" dormitories. Although there were three candidates, Siarhiej Antusievich had every reason to regard the first secretary of the Hrodna City Committee of the Belarusian Youth Union as his main rival. He was considered a favourite, but Siarhiej Antusievich did not give up. He came first in the first round and won in the run-off. It couldn't have been otherwise, because the voters thought of him as "one of them" and he had campaigned door to door.

I have heard these words so many times that if they had been completely true, Belarus would have long ago had a different leader. However, either the campaigners came to the wrong "doors", or the campaigners were the wrong people, or the campaigns were run only in paper reports.

I have heard a lot about stolen votes, something that all opposition supporters have always taken for granted. Siarhiej Antusievich's team knew about possible electoral fraud, too, but knowledge alone does not guarantee success. You have to know how to fight it, and this is what Siarhiej Antusievich and his team did.

The next time the government was better prepared for the upcoming parliamentary elections. In all probability some local ideologues were well aware that it would be impossible to defeat Siarhiej Antusievich in fair elections, so he was simply denied registration as a parliamentary candidate.

This was certainly a powerful blow for the whole team, but they did not throw n the towel. Instead, they monitored the voting so closely that again there was no electoral fraud. Moreover, the 52th Hrodna Constituency was the only one in Belarus (sic!) where the election was declared void due to the low turnout.

I believe this is a good example of how to fight for your cause. Of course the opponents of the current regime have every reason to complain about unfair elections, but they have to realise they will never enjoy "hot-house" conditions. Unfortunately, things have changed for the worse for those who struggle against the present government, but this cannot forever justify all their failures. It is a sad thing that instead of real practical work they often complain about the "vicious regime".



ANTON ASTAPOVICH

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This person's name was mentioned in mass media recently more often that the names of some prominent opposition activists. It can be explained by the fact that Chairman of the Society for Protection of Monuments Anton Astapovich is in opposition to the way some people treat our past and not to a specific person. And it is not important to him on which side of the barricades they find themselves.

Stones of Youth

When on 23 October 1964 a boy was born in Asipovichy, then no one (except God, of course) could predict that one day this baby would protect historical heritage of our nation. Perhaps, this thesis can seem too pathetic to some, but for example, I can recall a handful of persons who are not only fighting for something specific but also winning from time to time.

After high school, Anton Astapovich entered the Minsk Medical School. He graduated with honors in 1984 and became a paramedic. He worked for some time in the medical emergency and entered the renowned Minsk Medical Institute that became a university under the current authorities.

Just at that time they began drafting students in the army and the government gave an opportunity to Anton Astapovich to think about his fate during two years. And most importantly, to decide whether to continue his studies or to engage in occupation that was closer to his heart.

In autumn of 1987, Anton took discharge from the military service, left the Medical Institute and got a job in the railway hospital of

his home town of Asipovichy. And in 1989, he was admitted to the correspondence course (because almost no 25-years-olds studied in the full-time course) of the Department of History of the Belarusian State University.

A logical question arises: why had he to make unnecessary fuss with medicine if he always liked history more? The answer is simple — some pressure from his parents. They were mature and practical people and did not consider history to be an occupation that would earn him some stable inflow of bread and butter (in our country everybody thinks of it). The medical doctor is another thing. By the way, the Hrytskievich brothers (both of them are historians) also studied medicine...

Astapovich immediately got lucky in the new field. Despite the fact that he studied only in the first year, he was already well known among historians and regional ethnographers, so he immediately got a job as a junior researcher in the Department of Holdings of the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Everyday Life and a year later he was appointed the head of the sector of Central Belarus in the Exhibition Department. He devoted more than 16 years of his life to this museum.

He was also fortunate (as Astapovich himself believes) in having taught (when he was already the Deputy Director of the Museum) in the sub-department of the University of Culture that was headed by Anatol Piatrovich Hrytskievich. And thanks to the book "Torch of Hippocrates" (1987) by Valiantsin Hrytskievich he discovered the genuine history of the Belarusian medicine.

Foundations of the Museum

Most people mistakenly associate the Belarusian State Museum of Folk Architecture and Everyday Life with Strochytsy but more exactly it should be associated with the village of Aziartso because the museum is actually at its outskirts. The heritage buildings of traditional folk architecture were brought from all over Belarus on 150 hectares of the museum land and restored there.

When in 2006 Anton Astapovich left the museum, many saw some political connotation there because the presidential election was held at that time. And this is quite understandable. Anton Astapovich is a long time member of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front. Even

in 1989 he attended the founding congress in Vilnius (as a delegate from Asipovichy). And he never joined any other political structure.

After his 16 years of work in the museum Anton Astapovich emerged as one of the most reputable experts in this field in the country but I will focus your attention only on some episodes.

First of them relates to one of the expeditions during which museum staff were engaged in identification and recording of monuments of wooden architecture as well as collection of ethnographic (oral) material and objects of museum value. From 1990 to 1996, when proper funding was available, there were many such expeditions.

In September 1991, new national symbols were adopted and the white-red-white flag became the official flag. A month later, an expedition went to Klietsk. Astapovich and his colleagues checked into a hotel that was across the street from the building of the district executive committee on which something red and green was hanging. And when the researchers were having their travel documents stamped, Anton asked: "Why are you violating the laws of independent Belarus? Why do you have something hanging, which was abolished more than a month ago?"

What a stir it caused! Astapovich was taken to a deputy chairman of the district executive committee and the latter began making excuses: look, there is smoke, we pave road with asphalt, so we are afraid that the new flag can get covered with soot, we will finish all works in three to four days...

The manager was so scared that the repair time was significantly reduced and the state flag was waving on the building in a few hours. On this occasion, Anton Astapovich always jokes that it was he who raised the white-red-white flag over Klietsk in 1991.

The nicest thing in the expeditions is meeting people who leave in the Belarusian outback. For example, in the Shchuchyn district, the researchers met an 80-year-old man who once was a Polish lancer and was able to draw a little. In his house there was an oil-painted self-portrait where he was astride and Marshal Pilsudski stood next to him.

In the expeditions Belarus opens itself in new ways in some sense. As Astapovich believes, if there have been no expeditions, then his famous tours would not have happened because the foundations were laid at the time when he traveled throughout 85 per cent of Belarus and saw all most important objects of historic value.

There are only a few such people in Belarus...

Ideological foundations

It is hard to imagine but for some time Anton Astapovich was officially the "chief ideologist" of his museum. In 2002, he was appointed the deputy director for research and in 2004, the Ministry of Culture demanded to impose an additional duty of responsible for ideology on one of the deputy directors. Apart from Astapovich, the director had only two deputies, one for construction and restoration and the other one for administrative matters. Besides, they were in the retirement age. So much about ideology. So it is quite understandable that the choice was simple.

The ministry approved it, and even when in 2006 the place of the former director was taken by a new boss (she later pushed Astapovich out), the "ideology" was not taken away from him. By the way, he still maintains very positive attitude towards those duties because, by and large, they embrace only those things that are present in the Program of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front — human rights, national character of the state, heritage etc. Those who do not believe it can open any official textbook. There is nothing there about lick-spittling towards the existing authorities. Today’s officials see it between the lines...

Anton Astapovich never hid his belief system so he took easy any attempt to see some politics in his actions or deprive him of the ideological duties. These attempts occurred repeatedly but they always broke against the logic of a local (very professional) lawyer. For example, the latter explained in layman’s terms that it was possible to "take away ideology" only in one case — because of an increased workload in scientific matters with retention of the job allowance because Astapovich was acting in strict compliance with the existing ideology textbooks.

But the intentions were to the contrary. If they were not able to fire him they needed it to do it in such a way that Astapovich left on his own will. And money was not the last argument there.

It so happened on 1 September 2006. Despite the fact that in a few days (on 9 September) the museum was going to celebrate the 30th anniversary of its creation, Anton Astapovich submitted his notice to terminate and collected his workbook. And since then he came there on two occasions only. The first time it was by accident in 2007 when a film with his participation was shot in that place. And the second time it was in August 2009 when he held an international volunteer summer camp and came there in the framework of another tour.

To the past for the future

Already in 2004, Anton Astapovich began cooperating with an independent television studio. He wrote scripts and was a participant or an expert. He also participated in various creative projects (public lectures, organization of volunteer work) and organized famous tours around Belarus. Besides, Anton is quick off the mark, so quitting a stable job was not a personal tragedy for him.

He focused his attention on the Society for Protection of Monuments. It was established already in the Soviet times, in 1966. Formally, Astapovich was a member of this society since he was 10 years old, because back then all students were enlisted there, and he began cooperating actively with this organization since 1990, when he began working in the museum and became a volunteer. He even founded a youth section with his associates.

On 7 June 2007, Anton Astapovich was elected the Chairman of the Society for Protection of Monuments at its regular reporting congress and since then he is engaged (in his own words) in "human rights activities" as he defends the right of our heritage to exist.

And unfortunately there is something to defend. While the legislation in this field is quite decent, law enforcement mechanisms are lacking almost completely in this field. The government does not even have an adequate inspection for protection of historical and cultural heritage. In Lithuania almost 120 people work at the central office of the Department for Protection of Monuments only, plus about fifty regional inspectors. The same situation is in Poland and even Azerbaijan.

The Department for Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage and Restoration in the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus has 15 staff positions. In fact, 11 people work there. And all regional inspectors (in addition to their main activities) are subordinated to and fully dependent from the local executive authority, which is usually the number one violator of the legislation on protection of heritage. No efficient control is possible within such a system.

The only exception is the work of the Society for Protection of Monuments, which is a 100% civil society organization. The Society for Protection of Monuments prevents arbitrariness of the officials and it is a thorn in the flesh of the authorities.

If we compare the museum expeditions of Anton Astapovich and his famous tours, it turns out that we lost quite a lot during recent years.

First of all, we lost the country estates. Earlier, there were quite a lot of them and now almost all are gone. In accordance with the plan of development of ecological tourism approved by the Council of Minister last year, investors can buy only 45 sites, and there are hundreds of them in Belarus. And who can guarantee that nothing tawdry will be erected there, like the Trinity Suburb?..

One can talk at length about the tours organized by Anton Astapovich, so I will confine myself to a few figures and facts.

At the end of 2002, he and his fellow-thinkers created an unregistered initiative "Belarusian Way" and began organizing "Tours to the Past" because the traditional tourist routes cover only 10 per cent of what our country has. In 2007, the World Association of Belarusians "Baćkaušchyna" joined them in organization of these tours. According to the most conservative estimates, more than two hundred tours have already taken place.

Today, there are 1800 members of the Society for Protection of Monuments throughout Belarus. It is a considerable force, and not a potential one but available. The Society for Protection of Monuments does a lot already today...



SIARHIEJ DRAZDOUSKI

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I read once that the eyes of a wheelchair user look at the world differently, from another angle. After my meeting with Siarhiej Drazdouski, Chairman of the Republican Association of Wheelchair Users, I would add a socio-political meaning to this exclusively physical term.

Beginning

Siarhiej Drazdouski was born on 24 November 1973. The Minsk street named after a guerilla fighter Fiodar Surhanau was the first street he saw in his life. His father Jauhien Viachaslavavich Drazdouski (unfortunately, he passed away already) worked all his life as a milling machine operator. He had the prestigious sixth labor grade and reputation of a specialist of highest qualification. He was entrusted with the most difficult, non-standard tasks within pilot projects. He worked at the plant named after Vavilau, the plant of powder metallurgy and the "Termoplast" plant. His mother Galina Aliaksandrauna is now retired but earlier she worked all the time at a printing plant.

Siarhiej's parents were always fond of water activities and took their son to various tourist gatherings since he was five years old. At that time, these were very prestigious and popular events. I am not very well versed in the regalia of this sport but I know that the Kuril Islands, Central Asia and Kamchatka are cool. I think that it makes no sense to enumerate all Belarusian rivers here: the list will be long.

Perhaps, they hoped that their son would become a famous athlete. But it did not happen. His younger sister Tatstsiana became an outstanding athlete. For the first time in the modern Belarusian history she became world champion in yachting.

First part of life

Siarhiej studied at Secondary School No. 130, which was known at that time by its monument-airplane (which School No. 130 shared with the neighboring School No. 65). There were no specializations there, except for the local choir. Siarhiej was auditioned and both sides became convinced that it was not his thing. Sports stood first on his list.

First, Drazdouski became interested in classical wrestling. The coach of the wrestling class visited their fourth grade. Out of a half of the class students who enrolled in the wrestling class he was the only one who stayed four years later. And suddenly, he switched to kayaks and canoes. A year later, he lost interest to this as well.

He took a real fancy for martial arts. Siarhiej got engaged in them in the eighth grade and carried on until he graduated from the Belarusian State Technological University. Until the moment when an accident changed everything. But it did not stop his fascination with the martial arts. Now, Siarhiej thinks about adapting this sport for wheelchair users.

After the school Siarhiej chose the Belarusian State Technological Institute named after S.M. Kirov (today it is BSTU). He specialized in forest machinery.

There is no sense in telling in details about his student years because, although many of us lived through them, there is something in common for everybody — it was fun. Until 7 May 1996...

One month before the defense of the graduation project, Siarhiej went on a picnic with his friends. That river was not the deepest one in Belarus. And besides, some unknown things were probably drifted on its bottom during the winter. Siarhiej Drazdouski dived and ... broke his spine.

Second part

The second part of life started exactly in the moment when Siarhiej dived. In such cases life is divided into two parts — "before the illness" and "with it". The next year was almost entirely spent in hospitals. First, there was the acute period, then rehabilitation, which normally ends in a health resort.

Six years ago, I was lucky to visit the famous Saki — a small district town forty kilometers from Simferopol. Almost half of the town is made of health resorts. Probably, you do not have this number of wheelchair users anywhere in the former Soviet Union. They are very comfortable there. Some of them even move to live there.

Certainly, friendship is always tested by illness. In this sense, Siarhiej Drazdouski did not have much disappointment. The support from his friends (together with his relatives) helped him to get back to normal life and to defend his graduation project in 1998. Moreover, a year before Uladzimir Piatrovich Patapienka (today, Chairman of the Republican Association of Disabled Persons) "dragged" him to a track and field competition. Siarhiej Drazdouski could not imagine anything like this. He did his first one hundred meters in more than two minutes. The wheelchair was constantly pulled to a side and drifted to the board. Today he recalls it almost with a laugh. The most important result of the competition was the fact that he understood that it was possible to live in a different way.

Coincidentally, almost immediately after this competition the "active rehabilitation camp" was held; it was the first camp in Belarus" history although it existed for a long time in other countries. The new technique was brought by Swedes and they taught it to Belarusians together with Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians who already had this experience.

There, Siarhiej Drazdouski first mastered the so-called "active wheelchair". It was the main goal: to demonstrate that disabled persons were able to live active lifestyle. It was a real discovery. I hope you will agree that it is very difficult for a young man to lose all reference points in life in a moment and then to get them back.

It is completely natural that when people make such discoveries, they immediately want to share their knowledge with others. First of all, so that others do not repeat their mistakes, avoid despair and return to normal life soon.

Thus, the Association of Wheelchair Users was created in 1997.

New content

For some time, Siarhiej Drazdouski was engaged in dancing (now, it is difficult to surprise someone with it), but he realized rather quickly again that this was not his thing. Civil activism was more to his liking, and he "switched" completely to these activities. Therefore, no wonder that in 2001, he was elected Chairman of the Association of Wheelchair Users.

Certainly, he wanted to give more direct attention to sports but in our country they are so underdeveloped that disabled persons must be athletes, managers and coaches at the same time.

In short, his thirst to civil activism won. It is interesting that Siarhiej became involved in it only in his adult years, and in school he skipped

his Komsomol. In the truest sense of this word. No, he studied well, but when the time came to go to the district committee of the Communist Youth, they were not able to find him, and there were no mobile phones at that time.

It is nice when a man does what he likes but it is even more enjoyable when he does not rest on his laurels. Siarhiej Drazdouski liked his new hobby very much but he realized eventually that he would work better if he also got legal knowledge. So, he began to study again, this time in the Academy of Management, from which he graduated in 2006.

He got employment as a legal adviser in the Republican Association of Disabled Persons. There, he met Mikalaj Ihnatavich Kalbaska under whose guidance he worked in 1998 as a specialist in rehabilitation equipment. He is a well-known person in the modern Belarusian history. There is no doubt that many of us remember the only wheelchair user in the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. Later, he even tried to become president of the country but abandoned the race during the stage of collecting signatures.

We should also mention the fact that Siarhiej Drazdouski did not limit himself to the diplomas of BSTU and the Academy of Management. Studying in the Higher Courses for Human Rights in Warsaw was an especially important event in his life. It greatly influenced his life priorities and formed his professional orientation.

In order to avoid confusion, I will explain that civil activities are often carried out on a voluntary basis and the full-time job is a paid activity. I mention this to say that the new position did not prevent Siarhiej from continuing to head the Association of Wheelchair Users.

In 2009, he wanted to leave his position in order to create the Office for Human Rights of Disabled Persons. He was not able to do it at that time but his "voluntary resignation" was only a matter of time.

And there is one more thing. Siarhiej Drazdouski has experience of teaching to students in seminars and workshops as well as (during the last five years) of working as a thematic consultant for a UNDP project.

Continuation

I will not list everything that has been done since the Association of Wheelchair Users was created. I will only mention that from time to time, its relations with the Belarusian authorities do not develop smoothly. In the sense that it works more or less efficiently in the

directions which it sets itself. It does not happen every time with the "third sector". Thus, there are permanent mishaps.

The most telling example is the work of the active rehabilitation camps. First, they were organized jointly but then the government decided that it did not need an independent partner anymore and created a fully controlled structure. Finally, the number of those who participated in active rehabilitation decreased manifold but the authorities were no longer asked difficult questions...

And anyway, in the eyes of government officials Siarhiej Drazdouski is an opponent who was repeatedly denied participation in various shows of the state-run television and his activities in strengthening independence and freedom of wheelchair users is "directly contrary to their interests".

If we compare the conditions of existence of disabled persons in Belarus with the conditions in the countries, which chose the path of democratic development (i.e., Poland), the difference is enormous. And the starting conditions were almost the same.

Nobody is even able to provide the exact number of wheelchair users in Belarus because they simply were not counted despite years of talking about it. They are approximately 10 to 12 thousand people. It includes only those who are "tied" to the wheelchair permanently or whose illness is of a long-term nature. The number of those who gets there temporarily and has prospects of full recovery is even greater.

The most interesting thing is that this level is inherent to almost every country in the world notwithstanding their level of development. The only difference is in attitude to such ill persons. Any form of discrimination in normal (i.e., democratic) countries is strictly prohibited.

I am sure that many asked now something like: "What's that got to do with democracy?" So, democracy enables people to help themselves and not to expect "mercy" from various officials. And this "mercy" is often reduced to trivial benefits and absence of obvious obstacles.

P.S. In 2011, the Office for Human Rights of Disabled Persons began its activities. The main outcome of their activities, in my opinion, has been the fact that the government also intensified its activities in this field. The saying that the competition pushes things forward comes true.

HIENADZ HRUSHAVY



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Hienadz Hrushavy, head and founder of the foundation "For Children of Chernobyl" that existed for twenty years, became the only Hero of this book who joined the angels during the work on its English language edition, on 28 January 2014. It was the last day of his life. But I would like to start with his socio-political debut because it speaks volumes about the most important thing in the life of this remarkable MAN — to help others.

The first group went to India. It was in December 1989, twenty-five children from the village of Strelichava. Altogether, over two decades, more than three hundred thousand Belarusian children went abroad for rehabilitation through efforts of the foundation. An entire city!

Steps to Lifework

Hienadz Hrushavy was born in Minsk on 24 July 1950. He was 40 years old when Gorbachev's perestroika began. Hrushavy is one of those quadragenarians who are believed to be among the last generation of the Sixtiers whose youth was touched by the farewell wing of the Khrushchev's Thaw, crack opening the terrible abyss of totalitarianism for them to see. The Thaw was over but the hope for change came alive again with renewed vigor on the wave of perestroika.

Hienadz" father graduated from the Physics and Mathematics Department in Frunze (now Bishkek) before the war. He fought in the trenches from the first to the last day, from Private to Major, commander of the regiment that stormed Königsberg. Then, he served as the commandant of one of the towns of East Prussia where he met

his future wife, a girl from Novgorod who had been taken to Germany during occupation. From Prussia, Major Hrushavy was sent to Minsk.

Hienadz was among the best students of the famous School No. 50 that specialized in physics and mathematics. However, he did not become a mathematician. He entered the Philosophy Department of the Belarusian State University having overcome tremendous competition. He studied passionately. He did sports — basketball, wrestling, and track and field athletics — very actively.

She began writing his graduation thesis already in the second year and finished it in the fifth year. It regarded Nicolas Malbranche, a major French philosopher, idealist and theologist. He had to learn French and look for pre-Revolution books. This student work was Hienadz Hrushavy's "pass" for entering the post-graduate school in 1972. And in 1975, he defended his PhD thesis.

Foundation and the Chernobyl Way

As soon as the movement "For Democratic Changes" was created in Minsk, Hienadz Hrushavy found it himself. And he came to the meeting of the organizing committee of the Belarusian Popular Front.

In the early spring 1989, Hrushavy first learned about some very important circumstances of the Chernobyl tragedy and in May of the same year he was officially elected the Chairman of the Committee "For Children of Chernobyl" of the Belarusian Popular Front that was later reorganized into the foundation "For Children of Chernobyl".

Now, many people say that the idea of holding the first Chernobyl Way was theirs. In fact, Hienadz Hrushavy was behind this idea and the Prague Spring of 1968 was an example and a model for him.

It was then that Hrushavy realized that civil society entities had much stronger potential that the political parties, especially in transition from totalitarianism to democracy. And especially in the conditions of Belarus, which was called *la Vendée* by Ales Adamovich with provocative accuracy.

This potential can be measured in numbers. If in the first Chernobyl Way (by the way, it was held on 30 September and not 26 April) was attended by forty thousand people, the one that was held this year was attended by about one thousand people. The ideological supporters of the Belarusian Popular Front made less than one per cent of those

who took their protest to the street twenty years ago. The others had different motivation.

Two weeks before the rally, the entire state propaganda mechanism began to indoctrinate people that the Chernobyl Way was an extremist escapade. The authorities scheduled a nationwide *subbotnik* deliberately on that Saturday in order to disrupt the rally. People were taken outside of Minsk by the entire institutes and enterprises. They organized street commerce. People were intimidated with repression and incidents. It did not help. The Chernobyl Way was held.

Lifework

In March 1990, Hrushavy was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. His political activities began. The same year, he became the chairman of the Belarusian Christian Democratic Party. It did not last long.

More than once, I witnessed how various political leaders sought to win Hrushavy over to their side. They all failed. He stayed with his cause. For people. For children. For their salvation. Fundamentally, to save Belarus" future.

The foundation "For Children of Chernobyl" was officially born on 20 November 1990. This is what was written in the certificate of registration issued by the Ministry of Justice but it started its activities much earlier. The foundation was one of the first stones in the foundation of the Belarusian civil society.

There are more than 20 definitions of the term "civil society". Some believe that it should embrace all people living in a particular country. Others think that it relates only to those who are engaged in certain social activities. Hienadz Hrushavy has his own definition. In his opinion, the essence of civil society is in three elements.

First: civil society arises only where people start to organize themselves and not at a party’s or a leader’s bidding. Second: civil society should deal with matters that concern if not entire society than its important majority. Clubs of philatelists or beer lovers cannot be called civil society. Third: civil society emerges only where it acts as an equal partner and, in a sense, as a competitor to the state because they deal with the same problems: ecology, social protection, health etc. Sometimes, the state seeks to subjugate civil society, to make it its subordinate but in this case, motivation for mutual stimulation disappears completely.

And sooner or later, civil society turns into an obedient mechanism of the authorities that the latter needs to achieve certain goals. The partner becomes a mere servant.

For Belarus, the Chernobyl tragedy became a real detonator of social activities. During three years, the state withheld truth, it was doing nothing properly, and people began to consolidate on their own. It was no coincidence that within a short time, about two hundred entities emerged all around the country that became the regional base of the foundation "For Children of Chernobyl".

There were a lot of those wishing to join the new organization but there were no membership lists at that time. Only in 1993, when the Ministry of Justice demanded "personnel record cards", fourteen thousand members appeared during a few months.

In 1996, after the referendum that put an end to activities of those members of the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation who were not controlled by the regime, among whom was Hrushavy, he asked his comrades for help. During a few weeks, one hundred and sixteen thousand signatures against revocation of the mandate of MP Hrushavy were collected by efforts of organizations of fifteen districts out of those seventy districts that were helping the foundation at that time.

It is clear that the authorities did not like all of this. They began destroying the foundation "For Children of Chernobyl". However, it did not work out really well. One case was particularly eloquent.

Withstand and Refuse to Submit

In times of the Communist rule, the Committee of People's Control played rather an important role. It was ordered to bury the first germ of civil society. The very first audit was held in the early 1991. A few days later, an auditor from the Committee asked Hrushavy: who were those people from different places in Belarus (up to one hundred people each day) who were coming to see him, what were they doing and how much money were they getting for this? He was very surprised that everything was happening on benevolent basis.

A day later, he invited Hrushavy to come and see him again. "Basically, he said, I finished my work and I executed the order to collect irregularities. None of you has necessary experience, so there are plenty of irregularities. Now, my boss waits for this information to

destroy you but I will act differently. I will write that there are no "nits" because I have understood very well what you are doing here and I've seen everything with my own eyes. I will better retire than execute their order".

The management of the Committee of People's Control was furious. For some time, the foundation was left alone. And then, there was the August coup that went badly, after which the CSPU ceased to exist, as well as "people's auditors".

A year later, the same auditor, already retired, called Hienadz again. They agreed to meet. It turned out that a granddaughter of the former auditor got very seriously ill and her illness could only be treated outside of Belarus. The donors were found very quickly, and the girl underwent all necessary procedures in Germany a month later.

As they say, no further comments are needed here. Later, even more auditors would come (with different measure of conscience), and Hrushavy would tell the same phrase: "May God give you all the best but it may happen that you may need help from people like us and you will remember to whom you did not allow to work".

This time may also come for those who in 2005 threw "For Children of Chernobyl" out of their headquarters in the Trinity suburb where they were located from the very beginning.

I do not claim it to be anything more than a version but I believe that the official obstruction of Hrushavy's foundation was a consequence of the fact that the authorities knew well the efficiency of the foundation's activities. In the early 1990s, people from the future president's team asked Hrushavy for assistance in organizing a branch of the foundation "For Children of Chernobyl" in Shklou. And on 9 June 1997, the Department for Humanitarian Assistance was established. Its activities resulted in huge reduction of this very assistance.

Threat was hanging over Hrushavy personally. Because of persecution from the Security Council of Belarus and a threat of arrest in March 1997 he was forced to leave for Germany where he stayed until March 1998.

After returning from abroad Hienadz Hrushavy resumed his activities. His worldwide credibility and support inside the country were so strong that the authorities had to back down.

The foundation "For Children of Chernobyl" is still alive. Only the focus of its activities shifted a bit. In the 1990s, through the humanitarian

work, the ground was laid for different social programs, which are oriented towards youth, women and various professional groups. This is why new program activities were launched in the early 2000, such as the movement "Women's Forum" that united active women all over the country for ecumenical work (rapprochement of religions), created a network of assistance to women who suffered from violence and prevents trafficking in women.

In the province, about 30 youth centers were created, which have been engaged in educational, environmental and cultural activities. Rehabilitation of children abroad continues as well. This ground united people who became proponents of several social initiatives. And the foundation helped them in their self-organization.

P.S Since its inception in 1996, the foundation "For Children of Chernobyl" sent over 900 children with severe cancer for medical treatment abroad. Through the foundation, over 200 medical staff — from heads of clinics to nurses — went on business abroad (to the U.S.A, the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, Belgium and Germany). Prior to the introduction of licensing by the Department for Humanitarian Assistance in 2000, Belarus received humanitarian assistance (mostly medicines) for the total amount of about 500 million dollars through the foundation.



ALEH HULAK

Prepared for publication on 2 April 2012

It was very difficult for Aleh Hulak to take the lead in the Belarusian Helsinki Committee after the years-long leadership of famous Tatsiana Protska. As it usually happens, people began comparing everything new with what was before. And they realized quite quickly that the level of work of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee would not change.

A "trip" to the past

Aleh Hulak is a countryman of famous Vasil Staravoitau whom the authorities tried to transform from the legend of domestic agriculture into an "ordinary former prisoner". Hulak was born on 1 September 1967 in the settlement of Zhylichy in Kirauski district, near famous Myshkavichy.

As you can see, his birth date is really school-related, so it was fully logical that Aleh Hulak's parents taught in school. His mother Janina Haurylauna (unfortunately, she passed away already) taught biology and his father Mikalaj Stsiapanavich was a teacher of the Russian language and literature.

By the way, it is in Zhylichy that the family estate of the famous Bulaks is located; one of them was once in the Council of the Belarusian Democratic Republic. During the Soviet period, this building was extensively used all the time; this saved it from a brutal demolition. Today, it is undergoing restoration.

According to its administrative status, the settlement of Zhylichy is situated between a town and a village. Much of the population there do not work in agriculture full time but almost everyone has their own farm. This is why the setllements are chosen very often for creating the window-dressing agro-towns.

Incidentally, the author is a huge fan of the "Tours to the Past", which are organized by Anton Astapovich, chairman of the Society for Protection of Monuments of History and Culture. Thanks to him, we went to different parts of Belarus and saw dozens of different agro-towns. And what is interesting: you can extremely rarely find a fruit tree near a house, which is not at all proper for Belarus. It has a prosaic explanation: people are not going to live there for a long time...

Lawyer's work

Zhylichy has one secondary school. Aleh Hulak finished this school in 1984 with honors and chose the Law Department of the Belarusian State University. It is interesting that there were no lawyers in the Hulak family; that is why he answered my question about the reason for this choice very simply: I liked it.

I will not mention expressly those who studied in the Law Department alongside Aleh. And I will not reveal specific names because many of them hold fairly high positions today. I will just confine myself to the fact that in 1989, Hulak graduated successfully from the university.

Unfortunately, it is one of the signs of our time. As famous people said, those who are not with us are against us...

In 1989, Aleh Hulak got the postgraduate work assignment to his native Mahiliou region to "rescue" local agriculture. Just like today — closer to the Chernobyl zone.

But Hulak spent only two weeks there. These two weeks became his human rights debut.

The fact is that already after graduation he married Anastasija, a future philologist, whom he knew for three years already. By the way, the marriages between lawyers and philologists were always very common. And not only because most of the former are boys and most of the latter are girls. Simply, students of the Law Department and the Philology Department lived in the same dormitory and it was much easier for the Cupid's arrows to find their "victims".

I will not recount all the details of Aleh Hulak's fight with officials from agriculture who interpreted laws in a very singular way, to put it mildly. I will only note that we got his way at the end and went to work in Pinsk where his wife was assigned.

To be more precise, he became a legal advisor in the "Kamerton" factory, which is a part of the well-known "Integral". And he was caught

between a rock and a hard place. Soon, the so-called "layoffs" began and Aleh insisted that "everything had to be done in a legal way". The result was predictable. The management accused him of being engaged by the employees. The employees said about "eating out of hand..."

Face-off

Aleh Hulak worked for three years at "Kamerton". Perhaps, it could have lasted longer had he not met Viktar Jarashuk, the leader of local Social Democrats. He was his wife's gym teacher in school. He was a fairly well-known personality and not only among journalists.
By the way, it was School No. 12 in Pinsk that went on strike in the early 1990s (including by Jarashuk's effort); the main demands were the political ones. And Aleh Hulak also became very interested by politics. Or rather, by what is laconically called the "third sector".
This was why it was logical that he actively participated in creation of the Pinsk branch of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. It was not logical that the authorities allowed these branches to be created in the first place because one can hardly imagine such a thing today.
It is also hardly to believe in another thing. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee itself was created in 1995 and its Pinsk branch was established in 1996. In order to hold a meeting with the Minsk guests Aleh Hulak sought advice from the then deputy chairman of the city executive committee and the latter offered his "small hall"...
Moreover, the Pinsk branch of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee for some time rented their premises in the same building with the local KGB. They even shared the same floor. Only the entrances were different... As they say, "eat your heart out, Harry Potter..."
In 1997, when Anastasija was admitted to the postgraduate school of the Belarusian State University, their small family (they have one daughter, Daminika) moved to Minsk and Aleh Hulak began working in the central office of the Belarusian Helsinki Committee. First, he was a lawyer, then the executive director, deputy chairman and in 2006, he became the chairman.
One of the most difficult periods in the activities of human rights activists began exactly at that time because a few months before Aleh Hulak's election to the post of th chairman, the rulings of all economic courts that considered their "case" were unexpectedly revoked.

The question is of a well-known story related to the grants of the European Commission under the TACIS program. Despite the fact that those grants were not officially taxed the domestic financial Pinkertons assessed 155 million Belarusian rubles in fines to human rights defenders. Factoring in the late payment fees, these fines now turned into more than 200 million.

They were even not embarrassed by the fact that these grants were awarded in the framework of international agreements and that similar funding was received by 29 other entities and that even the Belarusian courts considered these "claims" to be complete nonsense... If we remember "your only fault is that I'm hungry" we should point out that they became "hungry" on the eve of the 2006 presidential election...

Five years later, this "tax harassment" would result in the warning that our Ministry of Justice would issue to the Belarusian Helsinki Committee on 6 June 2011.

It does not make sense to talk about their other "adventures" as they are well-known anyway. I will only focus on the fact that today the Belarusian Helsinki Committee is the ONLY (!!!) independent human rights organization in the country that retained its legal status. All others were "cleaned up".

Perhaps, some will not see anything extraordinary here. Like, "what a big deal, they have not exposed themselves"... One can agree with this if we do not take into account the circumstances in which we all live. And the circumstances are such that for almost six years, a "sword of Damocles" hangs over Aleh Hulak that would utterly destroy his organization if they have a relatively "decent" excuse to do it.

You must agree that it is very, very difficult to preserve the unbowed character of your organization (as well as the organization itself) in such conditions. Especially if this organization annoys the authorities not less than a red flag annoys a bull. It annoys first of all by the fact that it does not allow imposing complete lawlessness and last year it even urged the Supreme Court to overturn the results of the 2010 presidential election.

Incidentally, the brutal events of 19 December 2010 affected Aleh Hulak himself. On that evening, he went to see what would happen on the streets of the capital and was detained during mass arrests. However, the next day a court found Hulak innocent and set him free. It was unusual mercy for domestic justice. More often the opposite happens...

Another thing. The Belarusian Helsinki Committee provides quite professional legal assistance to those who otherwise would be totally unprotected today. They, like a bone in the throat, prevent unhindered swallowing of another victim.

Forced dialectics

Recently I once again realized that "everything repeats itself on a new level" in this world. Now, Aleh Hulak has to engage again in what he was doing in the beginning of his legal career — protection of his individual rights. We mean looking for the reasons for the ban on his foreign travel.

I do not share skepticism about this. Like saying that in our courts one cannot obtain justice by definition.

First, one can cite a dozen of reasons and facts that refute this slogan.

Second, "the country must know its heroes". Or else, it often happens like this: an "anonym" invents different dirty tricks and nobody really knows whom we should "thank" for them.

As regards the odious proposal of an odious (ex-)propagandist about the citizenship, I will only agree here when the restrictions will be applied starting with such people as the author of this "know how". Because they buzz off to Russia and begin throwing mud at our "stability", which they recently suggested to reward with the Nobel Prize in economics… Disgusting…

When I was working on this essay, I heard a couple of times some complaints about scrupulousness and not-really-German accountability of Aleh Hulak. Moreover, I personally found out that there were some grounds for such opinions.

In my opinion, this trait is not the most important in the character of the hero of this essay. As we know, nobody is perfect. Besides, the one who tries to remember as much information as possible is more likely to forget something…

ANDREJ KHADANOVICH



Prepared for publication on 12.07.2012

The Debut prize seems to be among the most creative initiatives of the Belarusian PEN-centre because it is a chance for beginners in literature to have their first books published. My feature is about the debuts of the head of this organisation Andrej Khadanovich. Perhaps the story of his life will help understand why he makes every effort to push others forward.

Debut in Life

Andrej Khadanovich was born on 13 February, 1973 in the well-known maternity hospital opposite Piščhalauski Castle that has long been used as a prison. Jakub Kolas had been doing time there, a fact some psychics might have loaded with mystical connotations. For us it is just a fact. It is very difficult to hear any rhymes in a baby's first cry.

Andrej Khadanovich keeps joking that he spent his childhood "under the sign of Pinocchio". The thing is that his family lived in Alšeuski Street in Minsk, where the store *Pinocchio* selling children's toys was located. It window was like Disney Land for the little boy.

A family legend has it that at the age of "two or three" Andrej saw a teddy bear in the shop window and threw a tantrum demanding that his parents buy him the toy. It turned out that the teddy bear was not for sale but just "a shop window decoration". The boy cried his eyes out until the shop assistants agreed to sell the toy.

At first Andrej Khadanovich went to School No. 113, which provided special training in French and sports. The latter was a problem, since he preferred lying on a sofa reading a book to working out and playing football.

It irritated his father Valery, who had plenty of achievements in sports and wanted to find in his son a follower of the Olympic motto, Citius,

Altius, Fortius. However, Andrej had never been good at sports, until his first love had its say in the process.
Reading books and singing in the children's chorus of the Belarusian Radio and TV gave way to wanting to be liked by girls. The youth turned to the toughest sports that required a lot of stamina.

Debut in Romance

Race walking helped him lose weight, while rowing was a good way to develop strong muscles.
By the way, there was a girl who was a year older and had a very similar name Chadatovich practicing rowing together with Andrej. That their names were so much alike was a cause of endless jokes. Kaciaryna Chadatovich went on to become an Olympic champion. (When she got married she adopted her husband's name and is now famous as Kaciaryna Karsten.)
Her "nearly namesake" did not get to the top in sport because at the age of seventeen Andrej Khadanovich had a clash with his coaches. There were two reasons for that.
The first was that he could think for himself and asked too many questions. Of course, those who demanded total and silent submission did not like it.
The second was that in a training camp he made his debut in romance. Teenagers always see their first love as something all-embracing and everlasting. Andrej Khadanovich was no exception. Very soon he began to show "flagrant disregard for the sporting schedule".
In the end he was simply not chosen for an All-USSR competition despite winning in Belarus. Someone else was picked up for the team, which deeply hurt the youth.
Andrej Khadanovich quitted the sports club. This had an immediate positive effect on his academic performance. In the two last terms of his final year at school he got only excellent grades, thus becoming a top student in a wink of an eye. It may look strange, but he was even awarded a silver medal upon finishing school, even though he had previously had good grades.

Debut in Literature

It was a time when a medal still meant certain preferences if you wanted to go to university. Having passed his admission exam successfully,

Andrej Khadanovich became a student of the School of Philology at the Belarusian State University in 1990. What had prompted him this choice? It was probably the environment in which he had grown up.

A poem written in childhood can be considered his literary debut. There is nothing uncommon here. But the circumstances that contributed to it deserve special mention.

About the New Year time when Andrej was four his family were decorating a New Year tree. Everyone knows what glass decorations look like. The little boy's inquisitive mind demanded that he pull the metal fastener off and put it into a socket, which it fitted perfectly, at least in his opinion.

Andrej got a powerful electric shock. Luckily for him, he was holding the fastener with just two fingers, otherwise no one would have heard his first poem. I am not going to quote that "little free verse", first of all because the author himself is now very critical of its syntax and intends to edit the text thoroughly. Nor would it make any sense to cite his rhymed contributions to the school paper that was normally put on the notice board or poetic dedications to his university friends.

The future poet's father was a journalist and worked for a number of newspapers. He also wrote poems but did not have a collection of poetry published, since he had nothing to say on important ideological topics like "Lenin, the communist party and the YCL". The son, who woke up and went to bed to the sound of a typewriter clattering, must have inherited a "creativity gene" from his father.

Debut as a Protester

Andrej Khadanovich's mother Irina was born in Velikie Luki in Russia. She spent her childhood and adolescence in the Russian-speaking part of Kazakhstan and in her youth she lived in Moscow. She moved to the Belarusian capital just before she got married.

For this reason Andrej Khadanovich's mother is one of the few people with whom he speaks Russian. It is quite understandable.

Some people may disagree, but I do not understand those who make a point of showing that they belong to the Belarusian-language elite by speaking what they think is Belarusian but is in fact a mixture of Russian and Belarusian words. There are also some others for whom Belarusian is just a fashionable brand. On the other hand, I feel indignant when Belarusian-language guests at TV stations immediately switch to Russian when TV hosts address them in this language.

That is why I like Andrej Khadanovich candidly admitting that for some time he wrote his poems in Russian. It was his "youth's snobbery" that pushed him to choose the department of Russian philology at university, as the competition for admission there was much tougher than at the Belarusian-language department.
...According to Andrej Khadanovich, the university stage was "a way of escaping conscription to the Belarusian army". When he became a student of the School of Philology, its military department was closed down, which meant that upon graduation he would have to do military service at least for a year.
The department must have been closed down because there had always been very few "future soldiers of the Fatherland" studying at the School of Philology" and even the "stable" Soviet economy had to cut costs.
Together with his female fellow students Andrej Khadanovich diligently attended a nursing course and got his qualifications as a nurse. He knew how to dress a wound and even deliver a baby (in theory).
After he got his university degree and began getting call-up papers from the military commissariat Andrej Khadanovich escaped conscription by doing a postgraduate course at the Belarusian State University. He combined his studies with teaching French literature at the School of Philology. Actually he has been a lecturer for over a decade already.
He made his debut as a Belarusian-language poet in 1996. There were a lot of contributing factors and the aesthetical one was the most important. However, romantic political aspirations also played a role.
In May 1995 the notorious referendum was held. It "robbed Belarus of its national symbols and created legal grounds for linguistic discrimination against Belarusians in Belarus".
This is more than just a quote from my conversation with Andrej Khadanovich as a citizen. It is his principled stand.

Debut in Politics

Andrej Khadanovich's first book of poetry was called *Old Poems*. It came out in 2003 in Belarusian. Today he is the author of nine books, six of them in Belarusian and three in Ukrainian, Polish and Swedish translations. His poems and translations have been published in different periodicals hundreds of times.
Andrej Khadanovich has been awarded a lot of prestigious prizes, including international ones. But he received his first prize from *Krynica*

journal. In 2002 Andrej Khadanovich joined the Belarusian Centre of the International P.E.N. and in 2008 he was elected its chairperson.

On 5 December, 1998 Andrej Khadanovich married his fellow student Maryna. On 10 May, 2006 she had a wonderful baby daughter called Alena. Although Andrej Khadanovich has reservations about using patronymics, he often ironically calls his little daughter Alena Andrejeuna. It may be because she really takes after her father.

Andrej Khadanovich likes quoting Joseph Brodsky's words that a writer has not right to mess with politics as long as politics does not mess with him. Unfortunately, nowadays politics does mess up with Andrej Khadanovich, even though basically he is completely indifferent to politics.

Although he is rather sceptical of Belarusian politicians, both in the government and in the opposition, Andrej Khadanovich holds a firm belief that when H-Hour comes in the life of the society no one, including poets, can sit on the sidelines.

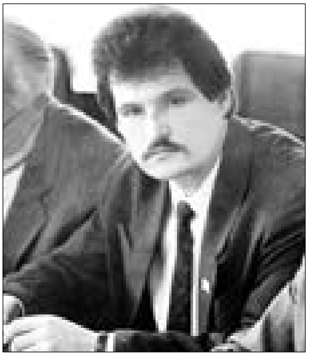
These crucial moments were the presidential elections in 2006 and 2010. In 2006 Andrej Khadanovich recited poems and sang his songs at a rally in Kastrychnickaja Square and came to the tent camp there every day until it was crushed. In 2010 he sang his translation of Lluís Llach's song in Independence Square.

Originally it was composed by the Catalan songwriter in the late 1960s, when Catalonia was fighting for its rights during General Franco's dictatorship, and had the title *L'Estaca* (The Stake). The Polish songwriter Jacek Kaczmarski rendered it into Polish as *Mury* (The Walls) at the times of *Solidarność*.

Andrej Khadanovich took *Mury* as the basis for his song. The image of the wall had lost part of its symbolic meaning, as the Berlin Wall had already been broken down. So the Belarusian poet also used the images of prison and freedom. It would be a good finishing line for this feature, "Break down the prison walls! If you desire freedom, take it!"

P.S. A video recently uploaded on the Internet showed a young Russian poet Kirill Medvedev singing his translation of this famous song into Russian under arrest in the paddy wagon. It was a protest against the developments in Russia.

MIRASLAU KOBASA



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When I asked Miraslau Kobasa to tell about his life, he started not from his date of birth but from the day of creation of the Educational Public Association "Foundation named after Leu Sapieha". During recent years I asked different people this question for more than one hundred times but it was for the first time that I heard this chronology of response…

Star Dream

Miraslau Kobasa was born on 2 June 1954 in the district center of Dalina in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. As many 17-years-old young men, he was fond of science-fiction and wanted to be closer to stars but the universities that taught astronomy were in Kyiv, Moscow, St. Petersburg and some other distant cities. Miraslau was well aware that it was practically impossible to get there with his provincial school diploma (almost exclusively excellent marks) so he chose "astronomy and geodesy" of the Lviv Polytechnic Institute.

Incidentally, Miraslau's father, Uladzimir Dziamjanavich, was an oil-field worker, in the direct sense of the word. Few people know that Ukraine covers the needs of its population in oil and gas and buys them in Russia for industry only. The nearest oil rig was only three hundred meters from Kobasa's home.

During the first 12 years of Miraslau's life his mother Maryja Stsiapanauna raised him and his sister and was a housewife and later worked as a coal-heaver and at the oil rig base.

One can say that Miraslau got to Minsk thanks to Aeroflot: the postgraduate work assignments were all over the Soviet Union. His

profession required a fairly long practical training after each year of study. After his first year Kobasa worked in the Belarusian geodesy for six months. There, they offered him a job after his graduation from the Lviv Polytechnic Institute. It was in late October 1975.

So Miraslau Kobasa did. In May 1976, he came for a few hours from Lviv to Minsk, picked up the prepared invitation, went back and took it in person to the dean's office. The cost of a one-way ticket was seventeen Soviet rubles, which was quite a lot, but the dream was worth much more.

He never regretted his choice though it was not really directly related to stars. Kobasa sacrificed 14 years of his life to his new profession, more than half of which were spent in business trips. There, they lived according to the principle "everybody is his own boss" and they understood well what the true freedom was.

Certainly, not every wife would withstand this rhythm. And here again, Miraslau was very lucky. Tatsiana graduated from the same department but two years later and with specialization in "engineer geodesy" and she understood well what she should expect.

During the first six years Miraslau Kobasa worked as a team leader and the last eight years he was head of a survey crew. Maybe, later this freedom of action would become the foundation of another freedom, the freedom of thought.

Per aspera ad astra

It all began when in 1990 Miraslau Kobasa was elected a councilor of Minsk City Council. Now, it cannot happen by definition but then there were three factions — Communists, democrats, where most members were representatives of the Belarusian Popular Front, and neutrals — those who became disenchanted with the CPSU but did not make their mind about their political priorities.

Kobasa was elected the Chairman of the Commission on Benefits and Privileges. There, he understood that he lacked proper education and entered the Law Department in the Belarusian State University. Moreover, it became absolutely clear that in order to make changes in society one should not boast of easy victory but to take more fundamental approach to everything. Some basis was needed to achieve this goal.

On 26 June 1992, an initiative group that included eighteen people who were respected in Belarus (and beyond), i.e. artist Ales Marachkin

and writer Artur Volski, held the founding congress of one of the most known organizations of the "third sector". Some time was spent on preparing the necessary documents and on 11 July 1992 it was registered in the Ministry of Justice of Belarus.

Then, it was the Belarusian Republican Foundation for Support of Democratic Reforms. And the familiar "named after Leu Sapieha" appeared much later, during another re-registration, and the organization survived six of those during its eighteen years of existence. Almost all of them were under the current authorities.

As always, at the initial stage the new foundation had some organizational difficulties but already since 1994 they were able to rent premises, have small staff and their own accountant. Those who understand will confirm that it is not bad.

The first chairman was Gieorhij Kunievich, a renowned lawyer and a former councilor of the Minsk City Council, who now teaches in the Belarusian State University. He led the organization until 1997 when Miraslau Kobasa was elected to this post. And he came to work there on 5 May 1994.

I will not list all the activities of the organization here but I will focus your attention on the most important ones because it will help to understand why the authorities believe that the Educational Public Association "Foundation named after Leu Sapieha" is an opposition organization though it stressed from the very beginning that it was a fully apolitical organization. It refers to the "development of local seft-government" and "exercise of rights of citizens in local community".

Per astra ad aspera

They worked more or less normally until 1995. At that time, there were 55 cooperation agreements with various local authorities. There were normal relations with the Commission of the Supreme Soviet on Local Self-Government (such a commission existed) and various government agencies. And then they began creating the "hierarchy".

In practice, this was how it happened. First, the councils of different levels lost control over the executive committees and they were left without executive bodies. Then, they began luring the best staff in the executive bodies. They were gradually taking away major powers or forcing to "delegate" them to the executive committees. In short, there happened what was promised in the infamous phrase: not to lead the

Belarusian nation in the way of the civilized world. Nothing like this happened anywhere. On the contrary.

Hardly there will be those who can qualify these conditions as favorable for activities of the organization that is involved in local self-governance but they worked nevertheless. There were interships abroad and many other different programs were carried out. The elections are the ultimate goal; something else is important: to make sure that the need for them was real.

During the existence of the Educational Public Association "Foundation named after Leu Sapieha" their events were attended by about eight thousand people, more than thirty books and brochures and about forty reviews and bulletins were published, more than 400 experts in self-governance were trained. You must agree that not all organizations of the "third sector" can boast of such working capacity.

Their projects were supported by such renowned organizations as the Soros Foundation, TACIS, the Eurasia Foundation, MATRA, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, NED, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, SIDA, USAID, the European Commission but it is difficult to surprise anyone today with such high-sounding names. Another thing is really surprising. Since 2001, the Educational Public Association "Foundation named after Leu Sapieha" is an observer at the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. In other words, it works where the official Belarus is still absent.

But the important point here is the apolitical nature of the organization, which is not a part of any party. Yes, it has supporters of various political parties in its ranks but it is their private affair.

In my opinion, the authorities were not happy with this situation in the first place. From the outset, they were not under any "state ideology", but the authorities were also not able to act on the principle "whoever is not with us is against us" because "against" did not relate to any specific personalities but to a direction of activities.

I am not an expert in the bullfight but I know that for the bull the color of the thing he is teased with is not important. The same is here. It is not important that some symbols are officially registered in Belarus. The main thing is that they came from the sources that could not be seen as controlled. In practice, it means that any government official or riot police officer can do whatever he deems fit.

When will the stars shine?

Poet Vladimir Mayakovskiy would have answered this question: "When someone needs it". Unfortunately, the current authorities do not need it yet. Moreover, they strictly banned not only the local government officials but also those who have at least some relation to the government from participation in the events of the Educational Public Association "Foundation named after Leu Sapieha".

For example, in 2006, two lecturers of the Economics University were fired for participation in their seminars. The most interesting thing was that they said the same things, which they read to their student at their formal lectures and never made appeals for any revolutionary changes...

It makes no sense to explain why the name of Leu Sapieha was chosen because almost everybody knows about the activities of the Chancellor of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. But it makes sense to tell how this name appeared in the name of the organization.

It was in 1997. I think that many people know that in order for a name of a prominent person to appear in any appellation, a permission of his or her heirs may be needed under certain conditions. Miraslau Kobasa knew that at that time at least two of them were alive — in Poland and Kenya. He was lucky to meet the latter during the First Congress of the Belarusians of the World. Kobasa explained the matter and received consent. It was the prevailing argument.

We will remind that there were a lot of different re-registrations. When the new Civil Code was adopted that regulated in details the activities of the non-governmental organization, the difference between the status of public associations and foundations was established. It turned out that the brand would be lost. Nobody wanted it. Thus, the name of the Educational Public Association "Foundation named after Leu Sapieha" was adopted. The famous name was preserved and the substance remained the same.

I am certain that everybody faced the situation that officials talked to us (or rather to those who feed them, to put it mildly) through clenched teeth. We do not need to explain to anyone that it should not happen. But what should be done? The answer is simple — local self-governance, in which the organization of Miraslau Kobasa is engaged.

INA KULEJ



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To be honest, I was going to start this profile in a different way, by giving statistics for Belarusian students abroad. Yet, Ina Kulej prompted another introduction. When the human rights activist Aleś Bialacki was standing trial, she came to the court room wearing a T-shirt with his portrait and a slogan, "Freedom toAleś Bialacki!" Ina Kulej was immediately thrown out and forbidden to attend the hearings "until the end of the trial". Why did she act like this? To my mind, one of the answers lies in the name of her organisation — the Solidarity Committee for Defence of Victims of Repressions.

The Shadow of "the Iron Feliks"

Ina Kulej makes no secret of when she was born — on 11 November, 1960, in the village of Kruki in the Brahin district of the Homiel region. The place can no longer be found on maps, as it is now in the Chernobyl zone.

Trivial as it may seem, but people's fates are indeed often determined by remarkable and absolutely objective factors. In Ina Kulej's case it was only half true.

Her mother Jauhienia had been trained to be a teacher. Ina followed in her footsteps. The whole logic of her life rejected her father Feliks's profession, because he worked as an investigator for the prosecutor's office. His daughter, on the contrary, became engaged in something totally different, at least from the perspective of an authoritarian state, where human rights activists and law enforcement officers are viewed as adversaries.

By the way, Ina's grandfather Ivan had also been a prosecutor and perhaps named his son Feliks after "the Iron Feliks" Dziaržynski, the

father of the security service in the USSR. Of course, he could never imagine that his granddaughter would fight against the heirs of Feliks Dziaržynski's ideas.
An interesting detail: Ina Kulej's mother comes from the village of Staryja Halouchycy and is a distant relative of Michail Marynich. Here comes another pretty trivial thing to say: it's a small world.

On the Way to Life

When Ina Kulej was only two and a half her father was given a position in Liakhavichy. Soon afterwards the family moved to Hancavichy, where they lived for twenty three years. From Hancavichy the girl went to Minsk to take admission exams to the pedagogical institute, named after Maksim Gorky at the time, but later renamed after Maksim Tank. However, she was admitted only after the third attempt.
The reason was that the girl had taken her mother's advice and applied for the Faculty of Therapeutic Pedagogy, which traditionally admitted very few applicants. There were only five universities with such faculties in the whole of the USSR, so the competition was up to twenty five applicants for one place. Two times Ina Kulej had failed to get just a few points at the exams so as to be admitted. She had to work in a library before she was finally successful.
When she was in her fourth year, Ina got married but retained her maiden name. Without going into any details let me just say that her first marriage did not last long. A few years ago I met Ina Kulej's first mother-in-law and was very much surprised that the two women got along very well. It is a truly unique instance in our modern world.
After Ina Kulej got a degree she came back to Hancavichy. Soon afterwards her father was transferred to Brest. Four years later the young family moved there, too.

The Way to the "Third Sector'

Life has much more to it than just marriage, so Ina wanted to have a try in another field, as the deported priest Zbigniew Karolak had advised her. This field was the third sector.
First Ina Kulej set up an NGO called *The Family of Families* and then began taking part in training sessions held by the Counterpart International. During one of these trips she met Alaksandr Milinkievich in Hrodna in 1997.

There is no need to speak about what happened afterwards. Suffice it to say that where there is a divine spark of love, all schemes and dogmas do not work by definition. It is not an easy thing to pluck up the courage and change your life when you are no longer young, so it deserves deep respect. Ina Kulej and Alaksandr Milinkievich made this step five years after they first met.

The political circles in Minsk knew them but were not worried about the possible competition. After all, they came from the province. However, when Ina Kulej and her husband moved to Minsk, things changed a lot, particularly when Alaksandr Milinkievich was nominated the opposition candidate in the run-up to the 2006 presidential election.

Just a few words about the *Vieža*, once a prominent regional NGO. The *Vieža* Fund for Regional Development was set up in the early 1990s. It brought together non-profit organisations in the Brest region. Of course the authorities did not like it and at the turn of the 21st century the *Vieža* was closed down, just like many others.

The "Wife's Influence'

Now they seldom speak of Ina Kulej's influence on Alaksandr Milinkievich, but during the presidential campaign of 2006 it was one of the most popular topics for discussion. About the same time I asked Ina and Alaksandr this question and was given a reasonable answer about the "myth of a patriarchal society".

The point was that if Alaksandr Milinkievich did not haste to take some actions, this showed first and foremost that he by nature did not shoot from the hip but preferred thinking things through. Moreover, he listened not only to his wife but to other people as well. Yet, when he said after discussions, "This is what I think", it automatically meant that the debate was over and no one could "influence" him any more.

By the way, it was Alaksandr Milinkievich who came up with an idea to set up the *Vieža*. It strengthened the third sector. After all, the *Ratuša* had worked in Hrodna for years already, but Brest had nothing of this kind.

As for the *Solidarity* Committee for Defence of Victims of Repressions, in Ina Kulej's own words, it is part of the Movement for Freedom rather than part of Alaksandr Milinkievich.

On Their Own

The *Solidarity* Committee for Defence of Victims of Repressions came into being on 5 April 2006, right after the well-known events in Kastrychnickaja Square. However, the organisation was able to obtain registration only on 15 July 2011, during yet another wave of "liberalisation" that preceded elections. By coincidence, it was also the birthday of the poet Alaiza Paškievich and the anniversary of the Battle of Grunwald.

It would make sense to recall another date, too, namely 30 March, 2006. On that day the Prime Minister of Poland Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, the representative of Belarus" United Democratic Forces Alaksandr Milinkievich and members of the Conference of Rectors of Polish Universities signed a Letter of Intent, thereby setting up the Kastuś Kalinouski Programme.

I remember as soon as it came into being, there was a lot of criticism on the grounds that the programme would drain politically active young people from the country and they would never come back. The reality turned out to be different, though.

Moreover, some of the young people who were supported by the Kalinouski Programme and could study for a degree in the safe European country, almost immediately chose to come back and deal with the harsh Belarusian reality.

The most convincing example is my colleague Barys Harecki. Once a spokesperson for the Young Front, he was sent to prison for the usual fifteen days and now works for Radio Racyja. Few people know that he had an opportunity to study at the University of Bialystok but preferred to come back to Belarus of his own will.

There are a lot of similar examples, which prove that there is no trend towards emigrating to the West, but this is not the most important thing. What matters is that in 2006 young people received a real chance to get a good education as an alternative to a degree in Belarus. Those who were facing the actual threat of repression had a chance to escape abroad.

It should also be said that the Kalinouski Programme is not the only one. There are similar programmes set up by the Czech and Estonian governments. Besides, young people from Belarus have been studying in the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia, Lithuania and Ukraine.

Furthermore, the work of the *Solidarity* Committee for Defence of Victims of Repressions is not limited to education only. It also includes providing aid to people sacked for political reasons, medical service for those who have been beaten up during mass protests, etc.

"Don't Be Afraid!"

These words said by Pope John Paul II are the motto of Ia Kulej's associates, because they have not only overcome their own fear but are helping others to do the same. The T-shirt with the slogan, "Freedom to Aleś Bialacki!" is a symbol of the way to freedom for everyone.
At risk of being bombastic, I would still say that Ina Kulej is one of those people who do not only offer people beautiful theories but also help them in practice.

ZHANNA LITVINA



Prepared for publication 30.06.2012

A lot of people have heard Zhanna Litvina speak of herself as the "mother of all the radio stations that have been closed down". The cause of her bitter irony is what happened to Bielaruskaja Maladziožnaja and Radio 101.2 stations. True, the government has silenced them, but it is not the end of the battle. Zhanna Litvina will go down in history as a talented radio journalist and the mother of new independent journalism.

In 1995 she created and became the leader of one of the biggest and most active NGOs in Belarus, namely the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ). She has been at the head of BAJ ever since, but it is not because she craves power. She has tried more than once to quit and go back to being a journalist, but she has not plucked up the courage yet. After all, it is absolutely clear that there is no one to take her place. Of course, it is not a problem to find someone willing to substitute for her, but who would find BAJ then in a couple of years" time?

Choosing the First Time

Zhanna Litvina (née Zaloznaja) was born in Minsk on 30 August 1954. It happened to be the same day that the person who was to become the first president of Belarus was born, too. Their paths would cross, even though they would choose completely opposite directions.

Zhanna Litvina's parents lived in the village of Vadapoj near Minsk, so in 1961 the girl went to the local school, where her mother was the dean of studies. Six months later the family moved to the capital, so Zhanna went to School No. 42 in Minsk.

Zhanna's father Mikalaj Zalozny was a prominent painter. He taught painting at the Belarusian Institute of Theatre and Art. It would have been natural if both his daughters had followed in his footsteps. Yet, Natalla was the only one who took up art. She now lives and works abroad.

Zhanna chose journalism as a profession. The reason was that she had felt from an early age that it was easier for her to express her ideas in words than in paints. In 1976 she graduated from the School of Journalism of the Belarusian State University and went to work for the Belarusian TV and Radio. She climbed the career ladder from being a junior editor to the chief editor of the Youth Department.

In 1984 Zhanna Litvina became the chief executive of *Bielaruskaja Maladziožnaja* radio station and ten years later, when Belarus had changed beyond recognition, she became the General Manager of BM-Infarm CJSC.

Moral Choice

A career in journalism may look attractive, but it essentially means managing people who know no less than you do. Besides, the boss is completely in charge of finding funds to subsidise the project.

By the way, BM-Infarm CJSC was set up after *Bielaruskaja Maladziožnaja* radio station had been closed down and turned into a newspaper. Several years later the paper was closed down, too. In 2000 BM-Infarm CJSC was liquidated.

It was at *Bielaruskaja Maladziožnaja* that the paths of Zhanna Litvina and Alaksandr Lukashenka, then a presidential candidate, crossed. *Bielaruskaja Maladziožnaja* was one of the very few state-owned radio stations that gave him a chance to speak live.

Viachaslau Kiebich, who was then the head of the government, did not like it, and in 1994 the radio station was closed down just before the presidential election. What had Zhanna Litvina's been guided by? Freedom of speech. By and large, society always benefits from this principle, even if in some particular cases the outcome can be unpredictable. Later on Mr Kiebich regretted more than once treating *Bielaruskaja Maladziožnaja* and the independent media in general the way he had.

Although Zhanna Litvina had been on Stanislau Shuškievich's team during the presidential campaign, the new government tried to make

her their ally, but she refused to side with them. Maybe she was one of the first people to realise that the old Soviet style in the media would soon be brought back to life.

I am not going to dwell upon the sad stories of newspapers that were closed down, or cleansing operations in the media, or constant economic pressure on the independent media, etc. Suffice it to say that Belarus is probably the only European country where news programmes are pre-recorded instead of being broadcast live. As the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov would have put it, "The sturgeon is second-class fresh”.

In 1973 Zhanna Zaloznaja, a student of journalism, first met her future husband Alaksiej Litvin in a library. Actually, first she heard him and only then saw him. Alaksiej Litvin was a military man at the time and had to wear a uniform. Just imagine the clatter of an officer’s boots in the silence of the reading room. They got married on 5 October 1974.

Now Alaksiej Litvin is a Doctor of History and professor. He is the head of the Department of Military history and Interstate Relations at the Institute of history of the Academy of Sciences. Alaksiej Litvin is more than just a historian. His articles appear regularly not only in specialised publications but also in the media aimed at the general public. That is the reason why he also belongs to BAJ.

By the way, at one of the first conventions of BAJ there was just one person who voted against the re-election of Zhanna Litvina as its president. It was Alaksiej Litvin.

After quitting the state radio in 1994 Zhanna Litvina and her associates founded Radio 101.2 station, which lived a bit more than a year. In August 1996 it was closed down under a pretext that its frequencies "intervened with the government communications".

Zhanna Litvina combined her work for Radio 101.2 with being in charge of the Minsk bureau of the Belarusian service of Radio Liberty. She chose to say goodbye to Radio Liberty in order to become one of the managers of Radio Racyja.

The Main Choice

In autumn1995 the Belarusian Association of Journalists came into being. The idea of creating an organisation of journalists belonged to the Vice-President of the Belarusian Centre of the International P.E.N. Carlos Sherman, who had lived a very interesting and hard life.

A year later it became a tradition to give Zhanna Litvina all sorts of figurines of frogs as presents, as this creature actually became a kind of mascot for BAJ. Volha Pankratava, BAJ Executive Director at the time, was the first to give Zhanna Litvina a toy frog. Now her collection has several hundred of them.

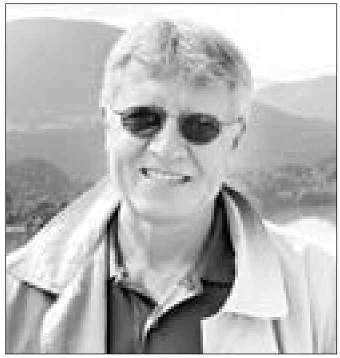
From the very first days of its existence BAJ has often been viewed as a political force. Government officials thought that it united all "dishonest" journalists, as they tend to refer to independent reporters. This is totally wrong, as quite a lot of BAJ members work for the government media.

Some opposition members would like to see journalists in their ranks or, still better, ahead of them at political barricades, which would also be wrong, as BAJ has different goals and objectives. In other words, BAJ is stuck between a rock and a hard place.

It may be immodest to speak about the awards of the organisation whose member of the Board I once was, but it would be unfair not to. In 2003 the Belarusian Association of Journalists received the Golden Pen of Freedom from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). In 2004 the European Parliament awarded BAJ the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In June 2011 BAJ received the Atlantic Council Freedom Award.

In May 2012 at the Eighth Convention of the Belarusian Association of Journalists Zhanna Litvina was unanimously re-elected its chairperson. If anyone asks why, let me answer with a quote from the electronic encyclopaedia, "An incurable altruist, she is prepared to sacrifice herself to a noble cause".

ALEH MANAJEU



Prepared for publication on 25.10.2011

I have more than once seen how the findings of opinion polls conducted by the Vilnius-based Independent Institute for Social, Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) made both the opposition and the regime angry. For sociologists nothing can be a better proof of high quality of their surveys.

No Choice

As Aleh Manajeu puts it, he was born in Stalin's time, on 3 February 1952 in Vladivostok. He spent the first four years of his life on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Then his parents moved to Khabarovsk.

There they got divorced, and Aleh's mother remarried. Her new husband was the military journalist Alaksandr Drakachrust. In 1964 he was transferred from *Suvorovskiy Natisk* paper to *Vo Slavu Rodiny*, and moved from Khabarovsk to Minsk. Everybody knows that military men, including journalists, are not free to choose where to live.

Aleh was four when his half-brother Jury was born. Today Jury Drakachrust is one of the best political analysts of the Belarusian service of Radio Liberty.

Unfortunately, Aleh Manajeu's stepfather Alaksandr Drakachrust passed away on 14 November, 2008.

In Minsk Aleh Manjeu went to elitist School No. 4, which was the closest to the hotel of the House of Officers, where the family lived at the time. The famous "Red House", i.e. the building of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Party was located nearby. (Following the coup of 1991, the edifice was turned into the seat of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus, and in 1994 it became a presidential residence.)

Quite naturally, it was the school where nearly all the offspring of the party leaders were getting their education.
However, in 1968 the "ideologically correct" milieu did not prevent Aleh Manajeu from joining a group of young people who held their own opinion of the Prague Spring, which was quite opposite of the official stance.
His stepfather, who was at the time the executive editor of *Vo Slavu Rodiny*, even received a warning from the local KGB officers. It was the first time that the sixteen-year-old Aleh Manjeu found himself under a watchful eye of the main secret service in the USSR. He would also be in the focus of attention of the Belarusian KGB, not only because it is a true heir of its formidable predecessor, but also because Aleh Manajeu always seeks the truth, which invariably irritates the regime in power.

Choosing a Profession

Aleh Manajeu's mother, who, unfortunately, also passed away in 2008, was a journalist, too, so it was no surprise that the youth decided to follow in her footsteps. In high school he did a preparatory course for the School of Journalism of the highly prestigious Moscow State University, sending his written papers there every month. An interesting detail: it was his mother and stepfather who tried to talk him out of taking up journalism more than anyone else, as they knew all too well what the Soviet "fourth estate" was all about.
Young people tend to ignore the older generation's advice, and Aleh Manajeu was no exception. The Department of International Journalism was opened at Moscow State University at the time, so the ambitious young man made up his mind to apply there. After he had taken two exams it turned out that he hadn't been a member of the YCL long enough. The only reason why nobody had paid any attention to the fact before could be the notorious Soviet-style irresponsibility. Or somebody's "vigilance".
Admission exams to Moscow State University had been held earlier than those to other seats of higher education, but all the universities in Minsk refused to recognise the grades Aleh Manajeu had got in Moscow. It was typical provincial envy, an attempt to convince themselves that they were second to none. The only exception was the pedagogical faculty of Hrodna University, maybe because it was very young and ambitious then.

Two years later Aleh Manajeu got transferred to the School of Journalism of the Belarusian State University, from which he graduated in 1974. He would probably work now for some newspaper if in his final year he hadn’t embarked on "seeking the truth" once again.
The aim of the "students" protest" was to make amendments to the curriculum, which was overloaded with Marxist and Leninist ideology. The students appealed as high as the First Secretary of the Belarusian Communist Party Piotr Mašerau and the editor-in-chief of the *Pravda* Zimianin.
In the end some slight amendments were made, but in essence hardly anything changed. The administration, however, soon took revenge on everyone who had been involved in the "protest". Aleh Manajeu was not granted placement in the *Znamya Yunosti* paper. Instead of working as a journalist he spent two years in the army, in command of a tank platoon in the forest near Lubań.

A New Choice

In 1976 Aleh Manajeu got lucky at last. As a student he had sometimes attended lectures on philosophy and the subject of his diploma paper had been social psycholinguistics. After he failed to get a job in a paper, Aleh Manajeu went to the Belarus" chief sociologist Prof Davidziuk and soon became a junior research associate at the Laboratory of Sociological Research of the Belarusian State University.
A few months later KGB officers paid a visit to Prof Davidziuk, too, but they did not get what they were after. In the past people who held important positions were probably more honest and courageous than they are nowadays.
In 1992 Aleh Manajeu got his PhD and soon defended his doctoral dissertation. Both his PhD thesis and the doctoral dissertation dealt with media issues.
Although in 1990 Aleh Manajeu was engaged in the creation of the United Democratic Party, which five years later merged with the Civic Party, he did not want to pursue a career in the party.
Moreover, when the Independent Institute for Social, Economic and Political Studies was set up in 1992, Aleh Manajeu’s former political associates soon became annoyed with its findings, as they found the figures far from pleasing.

The same is true about every regime in power. They all tried to make the talented sociologist side with them. In 1988 it was communists, in 1992 it was Kiebich's team and in 1997 it was Lukashenka's circle. But they never got what they wanted.
Then they began acting on the principle he who is not with us is against us, even though objective sociologists do not oppose any individuals but simply make their findings public, which enrages these individuals.

The Weeble Wooble Effect

The clashes between the IISEPS and the present regime probably began when the government realised they could not completely control Prof Manajeu. They were also irritated that unlike some "professional" opposition members, he did not stretch the facts to meet certain objectives and so enjoyed more trust.
So the regime began to pressurize Aleh Manajeu.
In 1997 the IISEPS initiated the creation of the Belarusian Association of Think Tanks, which united eighteen leading independent research organizations in Minsk and most of the regions. In 2006 the Supreme Court of Belarus ruled that it was to be liquidated.
In August 2002 the Belarusian government adopted a resolution with a long title — On the Activities Connected with Conducting Public Opinion Polls Related to the Social and Political Situation in the State, National Referenda and Elections and Publishing Their Findings.
The idea was very simple: in order to conduct any opinion polls, you had to obtain accreditation from a special commission led by the loyal Ihar Katlarou. A lot of people view this step as an imposition of primitive censorship.
Between September and November 2004 the IISEPS received eight (sic!) letters of reprimand from the Ministry of Justice, which resembled trivial fault-finding. On 13 December 2004 KGB officers searched the flat of Aleh Manajeu's deputy Alaksandr Sasnou, PhD in economics and ex-Minister of Labour.
The pressure continued and in the end the Supreme Court of Belarus liquidated the IISEPS on 15 April 2005. Why? We could quote the formal ruling but the way I see it, the main "fault" of the IISEPS was that it had got in the way of the carnivorous regime in power.
I said more than once that some organisations of those times

resembled weeble-wooble toys. The state would bend them down but they would always rise again. The same is true of the IISEPS.
Right after the Institute was liquidated in Belarus, it was registered in Lithuania. The philosopher Algirdas Degutis has been its director ever since, and Prof Remigijus Shimašius has become the Chairman of the Review Board.
The Belarusian sociologists have continued to work as independent experts. The well-known "Prof Manajeu's group" emerged in Belarus. Its members alongside Aleh Manajeu are Alaksandr Sasnou and Siarhiej Nikaluk.

Threatening Findings

I have always known that the findings of objective sociologists can be annoying, but I could never imagine that they can cause a real uproar.
Six months before Aleh Manajeu reached retirement age, the administration of the Belarusian State University, where he was lecturing, tried to sack him. They failed because 121 renowned and influential researchers from twenty eight countries protested against that move.
Following this unexpected storm of protest someone decided to launch an all-out frontal attack.
Early in October 2011 the IISEPS figures of President Lukashenka's all-time lowest electoral rating were published. On 6 October Aleh Manajeu was detained at 3 p.m. for three hours by law enforcement officers as he was going to the Polish Embassy to give a quarterly briefing for the diplomats of the EU.
The briefings have been held ever since the IISEPS was founded in 1992 and since its liquidation in 2005 the independent sociologists have been presenting their findings in foreign embassies.
According to the First Secretary of the Polish Embassy Pawel Marczuk, the briefings held by "Prof Manajeu's group" are so popular that foreign diplomats queue to attend them. Naturally, the briefing disrupted by the Belarusian law enforcement took place two days later at the Polish Embassy.
Let us not make a wild guess why this incident happened or who was behind it. Personally, I can't see here any logical motivation. As an old proverb has it, the looking glass is not to blame if your own face is plain.



SIARHIEJ MATSKIEVICH

Prepared for publication 3.09.2010

To be honest, at first, I was among those who mistakenly believed that Chairman of the Assembly of Non-Governmental Organizations Siarhiej Matskievich was a relative of prominent political analyst Uladzimir Matskievich. I also heard about his family ties with the former head of the KGB, also Matskievich. What a famous family name! As a person with a good sense of humor, Siarhiej never refutes this kind of mistakes.

Family of "public enemies"

Siarhiej Matskievich was born on 1 August 1964 in Pruzhany. An episode that quite clearly demonstrates the level of proficiency of government officials in the Belarusian language relates to this date. When Matskievich received his passport, on the Russian-language page they wrote "1 August" and on the Belarusian-language page, it was "1 July".

In 1941, Siarhiej's grandfather Silvestr Dzmitryievich was shot in Kurapaty. But he was lucky, he was not killed. While he was getting to his home in the village of Skibichy in the Drahichyn district, wounded, the war began, and before that his wife Maryja Andrejeuna with Siarhiej's father-to-be had been sent by the Soviets to Barnaul. They came back only in 1948.

When he knew that the "war turned in the other direction", Silvestr, though he was not a collaborationist, did not wait when the Soviets would kill him conclusively, and "went to the West". Somewhere in Poland he was seized and sent to a German working camp where the grandfather met the end of the war. Then, there was a filtration

camp. In order not to return to the USSR (many chose suicide on this occasion) he called himself a Pole and moved to America. In 1986, he died there.

Incidentally, about the fact that he was alive and lived in the USA, his relatives knew through the Voice of America, to which the grandfather told about his fate. Siarhiej's father who was a student in the Institute of Economics received a visit from the KGB immediately. And their family house — his, his grandfather's and his father's — was confiscated and moved to Drahichyn even earlier. Even after the full rehabilitation of the grandfather in 1992 their family did not receive any apologies or compensation like many other families. Ashes of the victims of the Stalinist repression still hammer at the hearts of their descendants.

Siarhiej was safeguarded tightly from such information so that he did not know anything and to avoid damage to his life and career.

Road to life

In the USSR, it was rare that somebody went purposefully to his dream from his childhood. Most only chose the direction and then the government decided everything for them. Siarhiej Matskievich chose the Department of Physics of the Belarusian State University not because he wanted to become a famous scientist. Simply, the exact sciences came easier to him that the humanities. Many do the same now but they are governed in their actions not by emotions but practicality and convenience.

He entered the Belarusian State University in 1981, and in 1986 he began working at the famous "Integral" where he spent eight years of his life. Those who know the recent history will notice that the most important and radical changes happened in our society during this exact period.

The Chinese knowingly believe that there is nothing worse than to live during some important changes in society; however, there are not only drawbacks here. On the one hand, the young professional did not have time to know the Soviet "stability" where everything (until the retirement) was calculated by the authorities. On the other hand, he got a chance to breathe free air. This helped him to understand that it was necessary to look for something new and not to swim stupidly with the tide.

Even while working in "Integral" Siarhiej Matskievich completed the course that trained chief accountants and financial managers of small businesses. In 1993, he left his job and went in free floating.

Among other things, the last years of existence of the Soviet Union and the very beginning of formation of national independence of Belarus were marked by a new wave of national renaissance. If the generation of Siarhiej Matskievich was not old enough for creation and activities of "Talaka" and "Majstrounia", their time came with the perestroika.
The first step of Siarhiej on this road was to begin speaking the Belarusian language. And he did not do it alone but together with his wife Tamara who he married immediately after graduating from the Belarusian State University where they studied in the same group.
The other step was, in some sense, due to a play of chance. When in 1996 the Soros Foundation was "chased" from our country some of its used computers were given to various public associations including "Supolnasts" that invited Siarhiej Matskievich to assist in drawing up financial documents.
Tamara came to "Supolnasts" later than her husband and was engaged in teaching activities there. Soon, this field of activity grew to a larger scale and a new independent organization was formed on its basis, the Belarusian School Society. And today Tamara Matskievich is known more not as a member of "Supolnasts" but as the deputy head of the Belarusian School Society. She concerns herself in the first place with www.nastaunik.info, an information and methodology web site for teachers.

Road to the "third sector"

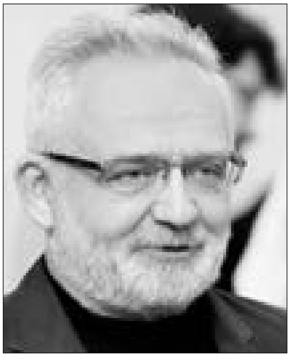
The public association "Center "Supolnasts" was created in 1995. Under the new government it was the peak of growth in the number of NGOs, which later was invariably declining from one re-registration to another.
Since the inception of "Supolnasts" and until 2002 it was headed by prominent politician Vincuk Viachorka but after the 2001 presidential election and the latter's election to the position of Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front he nominated Siarhiej Matskievich to the position of Chairman of the Council. There are scarcely any examples when leaders resign voluntarily and the opposition here is not very different from the authorities.
Always, when it comes to any organization, it is logical to speak of its membership but this time we will make an exception. First of all, because the usual numbers here correspond to reality rather nominally. The main activities of "Supolnasts" are directed at contacts with

different regions, identification and support of local initiatives. This is why the Minsk office is not representative of the entire structure.
Moreover, some members of "Center "Supolnasts", having maturated for independent work, branched off and created separate organizations in their fields of activities while remaining partners with their alma mater.
It was said and written a lot about the relationship between the "third sector" and political parties, especially about the fact that the latter seek to "manage" all forms of public resistance. It should be noted that it so happens from time to time. Especially when it is mostly "pure politicians" who form membership of NGOs.
It was not uncommon in the past and it is not uncommon now when people with membership in political parties remain members of several NGOs. With a significant difference, however, that if 15 to 20 years ago NGOs emerged from some politically engaged circles, lately, they increasingly shun such stereotypes. Moreover, they stress as a matter of principle that they are not "branches" of any political movements.

Road to the future

I may sound pathetic but I strongly believe that certain changes in Belarus will be associated with strengthening of civil society. I mean radical changes and not cosmetic ones. In my opinion, the new authorities succeeded in turning our history back, first of all, because they were able to "subjugate" a significant part of the Belarusian society, which did not have time to get immunity from all sorts of populist methods of manipulation.
In 2004, Siarhiej Matskievich was elected the Chairman of the Working Group of the Assembly of Democratic Non-Governmental Organizations (Assembly of NGOs). This post is very similar to the post of the president in those countries that have chosen the parliamentary form of government. In the sense that he has mostly representative authority and ability to give non-binding advice and others have the real power. And this is natural because in this case we are not talking of an "umbrella" organization. The Assembly is rather a "network".
Those who grew up at the times of "democratic centralism" have hard time to understand and accept this form of interaction. Today, the Assembly of NGOs includes about three hundred (they started from two hundred) registered and unregistered public organizations

of various fields of activities. It is impossible by definition to find a common denominator here. And there is no need for this, or it will not be the "third sector" but something very similar to what is happening at the government level.
Unfortunately, our leaders in power do not understand anything else. For example, in April this year they confirmed officially again they did not see any sense in participation of civil society activists in the programs of the Eastern Partnership. Like, it is useless and cooperation is only possible with the authorities and only in the framework of those projects that are agreed with them.
Belarus is the only country in the world where seventeen people were already convicted for "participation in activities of an unregistered organization" (and they are not registered intentionally).
As they say, comments are unnecessary here. It is surprising to see how barefaced the authorities are in defending their point of view.
The impression is that money in the form of loans is needed more to foreign politicians than to the Belarusian authorities... Anyway, those who seek support do not act in this way. If anyone can cite at least one positive and real (not propaganda) example of the so-called "political liberalization" I will be really grateful to him.
Incidentally, last November in Brussels, Siarhiej Matskievich was elected the coordinator of the first platform (there are four platforms altogether) of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership and the speaker of this body. It was established to strengthen the role of civil society in the Eastern Partnership, and to make it more important and substantial.
In other words, it was established to do something against what the existing authorities fight. The latter are generally very cautious about anything that was not created by them, even if we are talking about absolute political loyalty. The situation resembles the usual "black and white" division, which can be followed by absolute darkness. In order to avoid this, Siarhiej Matskievich is engaged in the "third sector" during 14 years.



ULADZIMIR MATSKEVICH

Prepared for publication 7.05.2011

In the circumstances when dozens of dissidents are behind bars, negotiations with the authorities can be offered by either "political suiciders" or "secret agents". Mr. Matskevich is neither the first nor the second, but he offers this kind of negotiations. And his proposals, if you try to understand them, do not seem utter nonsense.

Against the flow

I know that the attitude towards this man is ambiguous, and there are some reasons for that. After the tragic events of December 19, 2010 hundreds of people got to the police, and the explosion on April 11, 2011 not only "blew up the stability", but also undermined hope for some normal contacts with the authorities. Especially because the authorities needed these contacts no more than skis in the Russian sauna, according to Vladimir Vysotskiy.

Mr. Matskevich understands this well, and the main idea of his concept is to make the authorities start a dialogue. But in Belarus many people don't understand him, because it is impossible to imagine how to implement it in our conditions. And that's why most people prefer a boycott.

I don't want to take sides in these discussions, but I need to tell you one thing. Boycott doesn't mean idling on the sofa and is not synonymous with the concept of "non-participation". If you do it for real, then boycotting is more difficult than indicating your participation in the elections.

When it all comes down, the propositions of Mr. Matskevich correlate with the "concept of a boycott". I mean that effective progress (or lack

of it) is possible only when it is supported by something strong, because usually only "powerful" people are respected and listened to.

Of course, like many people, I think that the idea of a boycott is more logical, but I understand that the ultimate success requires not only emotions. It requires a certain proportion of pragmatism. Unfortunately, today the ideological opponents of the government lack it, but they want to substitute the reality by their thoughts just like those who sing about domestic economic miracle.

Perhaps this is debatable, but, in my opinion, the regime today deliberately provokes a negative attitude to itself in order to eliminate any aspirations to contact the authorities among the opposition. With the "broad masses", they hope, everything will be just "as usual". For 17 years this status has allowed one to "rule" and the others — to fight "criminal regime".

In this case it's necessary to note: none of them can stand any competition. Political rivals either "disappear" or are declared the "arm of the Kremlin".

Personally I would not be pleased to see how the authorities negotiate with those whom they called "fifth column" and "thugs" yesterday. Impossible? I won't think so. Everything is possible in this life, as long as only queues at exchangers and a daily increase in prices in the stores are "stable".

And some more facts. Like many, I'm tired of watching the opposition struggle against one another. An ordinary voter from Minsk, Mahiliou, Ashmiany, Smarhon, Bykhau, from a Navasiolki village doesn't give a damn about some political controversy. He is tired and wants changes: real changes, concrete actions, but not talks about them.

First waves

Now, as you've already guessed it, I will list the usual for such essays biographical data of Uladzimir Matskevich. He was born in the village of Cheremhovo in Irkutsk oblast on May 14, 1956. There his parents and grandparents were exiled. His father Uladzimir and mother Lidziya married three years before the birth of the future methodologist. By the way, they met already in exile, in the local Belarusian community.

Cheremhovo settlement existed since the end of the XVI century, but eventually turned into a small mining town in the promising geographical point. For the "open method" mining the country needed cheap labour.

In Stalin's time the problem was solved quickly and easily — the exiles. Among them were two parties of Belarusians.
In 1966 the Matskevich family returned to Belarus, to Hrodna. For nearly seven years they lived in different hostels and rented apartments. They received their own apartment only when Uladzimir went to the tenth form.
In 1973 he tried to enter the psychology department of the Leningrad State University (LSU), but failed. Why such a serious choice? He was driven by his teenage sociopolitical activity.
In high school Uladzimir Matskevich was a hippie, and even took part in the famous demonstration in Hrodna in 1972. But he was included in the category of "unreliable" not for that. The reason was a school trip to the Brest Fortress. The point was that the he had been there before and hadn't accepted the "bast-style" restoration, as he honestly wrote in his essay after the visit.
Under Stalin, he could be shot for this, but here the effect was just the usual "get out of school". The pupil was accused of "anti-Soviet actions" by the teachers. Mr. Matskevich was supported by his whole class, but that was his mother who defended him and with tears in her eyes was talking to the officials.
At the same time the so-called "pre-service commission" began. When there they read the characteristic of Uladzimir Matskevich, he was immediately dragged to a psychiatrist. That's how he first got acquainted with people of profession which afterwards he chose himself and to which he consciously prepared, reading almost all the books on psychology in the local library. These books were for him maybe the first source of dissent.

Sources of dissent

After an unsuccessful attempt to enter the university Uladzimir Matskevich called up for military service. The young soldier was learning to repair and maintain radar ground artillery. Later, however, it became clear that he was taught to repair the stations that have already been removed from service. Here he once again got convinced that it is very difficult to understand our life without the knowledge of psychology.
Then there was preliminary department and the status of LSU student. During his studies he got married. At the same time his eldest son Tamash

was born. This name was chosen by Uladzimir Matskevich intentionally: so that there were no "Russian" analogues. He managed to get Belarusian transcription in the passport, although it was rather difficult.

After receiving a degree in engineering psychology (he wasn't let to study the "pure" science), Uladzimir Matskevich got to the Bureau of Technical Aesthetics of Vilnius Radio plant. Eight months later it became clear that he couldn't work at the "military" plant.

KGB had not forgiven dissident activities of young Uladzimir, and Mr. Matskevich returned to Leningrad. For seven months he was unemployed and then he got to the humanitarian department of the Leningrad Institute of Railway Engineers. He taught future subway dispatchers and quickly headed one of the research laboratories.

There he also finished work on his thesis, but could not present it, as he had to join the communist party in order to do that. He refused. Then he got completely involved in educational issues and even prepared a new thesis. It also failed.

In 1985 Perestroika began. It captured Mr. Matskevich as well. I won't tell all the details, except saying that it was the time when he began to study methodology. In 1993 fate brought him back to Belarus.

On the wave of logic

Mr. Matskevich did some work in Shushkevich's team. In May 1994, together with his friends he created the Agency for Humanitarian Technologies, which he heads today. Almost at once their first analytical publications appeared. The "TV" pages were in his biography as well. I won't speak about the details, but I will only note that he first was offered to become the moderator of the "Resonance" TV-program, which had just been created. Even a costume was made for him. But his candidacy was not accepted because of Mr. Zametalin and Mr. Latypau, who knew the books by Uladzimir Matskevich, and knew about his involvement in the creation of the United Civil Party (UCP).

It is rightly observed, that the more time passes since the event, the more of its "godfathers" appears. The idea of creating a new liberal political party appeared in the heads of several people. And Mr. Matskevich is one of them.

It was he who (under the guise of an interview) talked with Stanislav Bogdankevich, who at that time headed the National Bank of Belarus, and

when on October 1, 1995 the United Civil Party was created, joined the first National Committee and even for some time headed its press center.

He is directly related to the "Charter 97", which appeared as a new element of civil society because it was planned to become broad civil movement. At first Mr. Matskevich met and even made friends with Andrey Sannikau. And then they were joined by Piotr Martsau, Dzmitry Bandarenka and Viktar Ivashkevich.

Mr. Matskevich formulated its basic ideas in written text of a statement under which the first hundred pro-democracy activists put their signatures. In spring of 1997 the work on the creation of now well-known institution, which hadn’t turn into a broad movement for a variety of objective and subjective reasons, began.

In recent years Mr. Matskevich is principally engaged in the problems of civil society — the "third sector". Let me remind you: "first sector" — state organizations, "second sector" — the organizations engaged in business. Not long ago on the Internet I saw a very interesting point: "third sector" today is formed at points of currency exchange. Maybe, for someone it seems controversial, but this spontaneous character initiatives and civil activity carry the main sense of the definition. The present "third sector" only occurs when the first two (i.e., the government and the business) do not want to get the full control of it.



TATSIANA REVIAKA

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Although the circumstances of our meeting were very sad, it began with laughing. It turned out that Wikipedia stated that Tatsiana Reviaka was Ales Bialiatski's wife. We had to correct this error or Ales' real wife, Natallia Pinchuk, could have taken offense.

In the beginning of life

Tatsiana Reviaka is really a beautiful woman. It is not a compliment. This is a statement of fact. And this is not the only fact.

Not so long ago an acquaintance of Tatsiana complained about a night without sleep because his daughter was teething and he was told: "When your daughter will be the same age as mine, you will sleep even less". Certainly, he asked about the age of Reviaka Jr. and was amazed — she was 21 years old.

Tatsiana Reviaka (nee Linnik) was born on 17 January 1968 in Salihorsk. I wrote this and blushed: my profession just makes me to ask women about their age. So, I use this opportunity to beg their pardon.

When Tatsiana graduated from Secondary School No. 9, she chose the Philology Department of the Belarusian State University as her further reference point. Perhaps, I should have not fixed attention on it, were it not for the circumstances in which the choice was made.

The fact was that Tatsiana was engaged in sports. To be more precise, she did orienteering, "fox hunting". When everybody was passing exams to get the high school diploma, she was defending the honor of the Byelorussian SSR at yet another all-Union competition. After the competition was over, the girl had only two weeks left to prepare for the exams. There was no time for reflection, so she chose what

was closer to her heart, philology. I hope, you will agree that the risk was very high because the written errors are those, which potential students are most afraid of. The school notes (all of them "excellent" except one "good" in chemistry) gave her a chance. And Tatsiana did not miss it.

Metamorphosis of life

She specialized in Belarusian and Russian philology, and her first lesson (on 1 September 1985) was a lecture in ethnography delivered by Nil Hilevich. And when her classmate Sieva Rahojsha spoke to Tatsiana in Belarusian, it once again convinced her that she had made the right choice, especially taking into account the new political background — the course for the famous perestroika adopted by Mikhail Gorbachev.

Now well-known Palina Stsiepanienka (then Kachatkova) studied in the same group with Tatsiana. Palina's mother was a teacher of Ales Bialiatski. This name was often heard among students because Bialiatski was one of two sponsors of the famous "Dziady-88".

Tatsiana Reviaka was Palina's friends since the application period when the girls shared the same room and discussed three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. And though Tatsiana was actively interested in the subject of dissent, she could never admit to herself that someday, fate would bring her and Ales Bialiatski together for decades.

The events of the USSR's last years changed people's minds very quickly, and they drove primarily young people beyond the Party's and Komsomol's rigid dogmas. In some way, the student's period of life of each person lays the foundation of his or her world outlook. At that time, Tatsiana's eyes opened to huge layers of culture, literature and philosophy.

The girl was assigned to work in one of the Minsk schools but Tatsiana did not work there a single day because after her maternity leave (during her fifth year in the University she gave birth to her daughter Nasta) she was transferred to the Literary Museum named after Maksim Bahdanovich where Ales Bialiatski was Director. It was 20 years ago.

The most difficult test

In August 1998, Ales Bialiatski resigned voluntarily as director of the museum and in October, Tatsiana Reviaka followed him. The

Human Rights Center "Viasna-96" will become their new vocation and civic duty.
Let me remind you that the organization was founded in 1996 and was officially registered in 1998.
The following year, the tragedy on Niamiha happened, which was the most difficult event of all 13 years of work in the new place. Now, when I have to communicate with relatives and friends of those who were imprisoned after the events of 19 December 2010 I feel that these people have hope for the future. In 1999, people did not. Those who lost their children, relatives and friends have only the memory of them left with them.
Nominally, staff of the Human Rights Center "Viasna" were divided in two categories — lawyers and "philologists". The first helped Niamiha victims to draft civil lawsuits and the second began writing a book to preserve the memory of the dead.
Tatsiana Reviaka and Palina Stsiepanienka were engaged in this job. You can only imagine how many human tears Tatsiana saw and how many human emotions she experienced then but in the end, the book of memories of relatives of the dead was published exactly a year later.

Lifestyle

I do not want to offend anyone from opposition organizations but many of them ceased to exist or became marginalized even after a half of trials that befell "Viasna". In fact, today it is one of the few organizations, which not only managed to survive in the opposition field but also to improve their rating in the eyes of people. I am sure that that is why they are under pressure.
The Human Rights Center "Viasna" is not only a place of employment for some people. This is a lifestyle, as Tatsiana Reviaka pointed out. It is a great degree of trust, respect and mutual understanding. The hierarchical principles of democratic centralism, known to everyone since their early childhood, are enforced rather arbitrary there. We can even say that they are absent altogether, as well as the principle of "I am the boss and you are ... everything else".
For the country with domination of the hierarchy this approach is unusual, to put it mildly.
I will not recall here all the twists and turns of the events, which relate directly or indirectly to 19 December 2010 because they are well

known anyway. "Viasna" survived five searches. One of them is worthy to be told about separately, at least for the reason that it resembles a tragicomic detective story and it happened exactly on Tatsiana Reviaka's birthday.

On 17 January 2011, Tatsiana came into the office, as it should be, high-heeled and "all beautiful" in the celebration style. It was at that moment that their office was also "visited". Probably, in order to confiscate what was not confiscated on the post-election night.

Let me remind you that the office of "Viasna" is located on the ground floor and, as usual, the windows there are fully barred for security. And only one (kitchen) window has a lock. This window did not come under the observation by special services. It was through this window that Ales Bialiatski ordered his fellow workers to flee. And at this moment he, along with Valiantsin Stefanovich, "conducted negotiations" through the door with unexpected "guests".

So they did. Perhaps, if somebody had put a video of this on YouTube, it would have become a true hit because it is a real show to see how a very cultured birthday lady on high heels climbs through a window with a computer in her hands.

We can only guess what the plain-clothed men felt when, instead of ten employees of "Viasna" who had entered the premises under their close observation, they found only two persons there…

The most unexpected test

It is clear that to get rid of this thorn in the flesh was a bee in the bonnet for the authorities. The Human Rights Center "Viasna" constantly resembled a roly-poly doll under the blows of repression. The authorities repeatedly pushed it to the ground but it re-emerged obstinately.

I will not be surprised if we find out some day that it was the hidden reason for the charges of "concealment of income on a large scale" because everybody understands that the arrest of Ales Bialiatski on 4 August 2011 was just the tip of the iceberg. The true reasons are hidden under water…

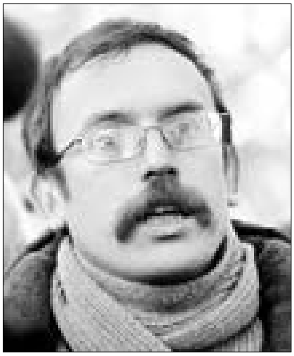
The fact that many of those arrested after the latest presidential election were questioned in the "case of "Viasna" and that the investigators were very interested in finances speaks eloquently in favor of this supposition. They might have wanted to find there material grounds for some new "television masterpieces" like "Iron on the Glass". They

failed, so they began to invent some tax claims. As everybody knows, if the problem does not exist, it should be created.

The credit should be given to those who created the trap for their Lithuanian or Polish counterparts. I will not speculate whether there were any money components there or not. Let us leave it to those who will investigate all circumstances of these heinous incidents. At this point, it is only clear that they chose the most popular "cheese" in the world for their trap — the taxes. In Israel, for example, the building of the tax inspection is called the "Wailing Wall No. 2".

We will put aside the actions of Lithuanian and Polish officials because there are many versions regarding their motivation. One thing is clear though, that, in my opinion, those who created "difficulties" must help to get rid of them and not restrict themselves to public apologies. Here I fully agree with Tatsiana Reviaka: they are of little help.

And I decided to write this essay about Tatsiana Reviaka not only because she heads the Belarusian House of Human Rights in Vilnius and in 2006 she, received the prestigious international human rights Anna Lindh Prize but first of all, because her position and actions as well as those of her colleagues from "Viasna" attest to the inevitable: the mentioned "roly-poly" — the Human Rights Center "Viasna" — will re-emerge. And brutal arrests will not impede this.



VIACHASLAU SIUCHYK

Prepared for publication 24.09.2010

The first political hunger strike in recent history of Belarus is associated with the names of Viachaslau Siuchyk and Yury Khadyka. They were on a hunger strike in the spring of 1996 in protest against their illegal arrest. In general, according to Viachaslau's mother, he has been arrested for more than 20 times and overall held in jail for more than a year of his life.

Path to the "front"

Mr. Siuchyk was born on December 18, 1962 in Minsk, but he spent the first years of his childhood in Pitsunda (Abkhazia) with his grandfather and grandmother, where they enlisted for building a "world class" resort. There he went to school. But a year later he returned to Minsk, where his mother lived and where he graduated from mathematical school #50 and received a high school diploma.

He was one of the best students in his class, but the humanities were easier for him that exact sciences, so the choice in 1979 was clear — the geological faculty of BSU.

After graduating from BSU Mr. Siuchyk again got to Abkhazia, where he worked as a junior researcher for four years. But then he finally returned to Belarus: nostalgia tormented him.

Debut on the "front"

Mr. Siuchyk created a support group of the Belarusian Popular Front in the Savietski district of Minsk in 1988. At the Second Congress of the BPF he was first elected as a member of the Congress.

In early 1996, many were quick to bury the BPF. One of the journalists even wrote that "new times come and we won't see white-red-white

flags in the streets". The reality was quite different. Freedom Day celebration in March 1996 was a complete surprise to the authorities and to some opposition members first of all because thousands of people had courage to go to the streets.

Then everything went according to a now familiar scenario. A criminal case, which was completed with the events taking place during "Charnobylski Shlakh" by the investigators. The leaders of the "Front" got under repression. Zianon Pazniak and Mr. Navumchyk emigrated. Mr. Siuchyk and Mr. Khadyka got behind bars. They were released only after a personal telephone request of the Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

After that there were a lot of different acts of resistance, including repeated "blocking" of the central avenue of the capital. Mr. Siuchyk became the "godfather" of the creation of "Young Front", but his reputation as one of the most radical and devoted fighters with existing authority, in my opinion, appeared exactly in 1996.

Starting a "second front"

In addition to "pure politics" Mr. Siuchyk was engaged in environmental issues as well, which is now referred to as the activities of the "third sector". He worked in the framework of the "Children of Chernobyl" fund.

During perestroika all the organizations which had anything to do with this area had to decide what they would do further. The Ministry of Geology, where Mr. Siuchyk worked in association "Belarusgealogiya", was not an exception. He took active part in the project "Ecological and geological mapping of the BSSR in scale 1:500 000".

There were no analogues of that project in the former Soviet Union: it was planned to make a description of all production plants in the country, each of them had to get its ecological passport. But the Soviet Union broke down, and the project got "frozen".

Viachaslau Siuchyk made his contribution to the revealing of the truth about the Chernobyl tragedy. He participated in the monitoring of the Chernobyl issue. He travelled around the country and always tried to use the information for the necessary purposes.

In the previous century the law (one of the best ones in the USSR) on the minimization of the Chernobyl accident effects was adopted. In this century it was given up for lost. So I think that the writer Svetlana Aleksievich is right: the continuation of "Chernobyl Prayer" should be written. "Orthodox atheists" do not know how to pray.

A la guerre comme a la guerre...

In this famous French phrase — war is war — there is perhaps a certain exaggeration, but the way Viachaslau Siuchyk was struggled against really quite often reminded a war. The point is, that not officials but close associates "shot" at him.

In 1999 Viktar Ganchar, who at the time was deputy chairman of the disgraced 13th Supreme Soviet, conducted the so-called alternative presidential elections. If the attitude of the authorities to them was clear, there is no consensus among the opposition on this issue. Some consider those elections justified, the others — not.

I will not take any side, but will draw your attention only to the obvious. Those elections led to a split of the BPF. One of the "catalysts" was the fact that Zianon Pazniak, who first himself persuaded the BPF activists to enter the electoral commission of Hanchar, raised the issue about their membership in the organization afterwards.

Mr. Siuchyk was Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front at that time. He was against the creation of two political parties and sought to find some compromise solution. He offered the solution, according to which the party remained headed by Pazniak, and his opponents led the movement. But that didn't work. MOJ was unusually fast to register two political parties with the same name. At first they even gave the same number to both of them.

Mr. Siuchyk himself was among those who supported Vintsuk Vyachorka, but then broke up with him fundamentally in his views. And in December 2001, when another congress took place, he became the rival of Viachorka for the presidency of the party. He lost, but didn't take it like tragedy. The tragedy was created later and by others, when he was expelled from the party... for "the split of BPF". Again, I do not want to make any conclusions, but, in my opinion, the constant "expels" of the dissenters lead to the fact that one of the strongest opposition organizations is gradually getting more marginalized. The impression is that they are fighting not against the authorities, but against one another...

Life after the "Front"

Mr. Siuchyk gave 13 years of his life to BPF, but his political activity didn't end there. After being expelled Mr. Siuchyk took an active part

in political life, not only in native Belarus, but also in neighbouring Ukraine. For example, he was the coordinator of the Belarusian group during the Orange Revolution.

After the infamous defeat of the "tent town" on Kastrychnitskaya Square, Belarusian Solidarity movement "Together" was created. It was legalized only in 2009. At the constituent assembly of this organization Viachaslau Siuchyk was elected a chairman.

In 2007 Belarusian "Memorial" was created. On the 70th anniversary of the tragic wave of communist repressions of 1937 the public organizing committee, headed by academician Mr. Haretsky, writer Mr. Yakavenka and historian Mr. Kuznyatsou, was created. In the following year the appropriate section was established. Naturally, from the very beginning "Together" was at the epicenter of this activity, as that is fully consistent with one of the main aims of the movement — the fight against ethnocide of the Belarusian people.

It will take too long to mention all the activities. Let me draw your attention to the point that, in my opinion, is the most significant in their activities. Of course, there are the famous trips to Katyn, but it's not only them. Since January 2007 (four consecutive years) every month on 29th day of the month in Kurapaty, an on October 29 across the country, the rallies to commemorate the victims of communist repression are held. Why on this date? Because on the night of 29/30 October 1937 more than a hundred representatives of the Belarusian elite were killed only in Minsk.

Kurapaty is worth mentioning separately. The only thing that the authorities did there is the establishment of a memorial plaque with an inscription, which says that "according to the decision of the Council of Ministers of the BSSR" memorial will be built there.

It was over 20 years ago... Belarusian people have repeatedly restored the memorial plaque and the authorities in any way are trying to hamper those who pay attention to the sad pages of our history and destroy the Soviet myths.

One of them concerns the partisans. Officially, they were all "good guys". But the reality was quite different. Just recall Drazhna village which is located near Staryja Darohi. In 1943, on Easter day, Soviet partisans burned there 37 houses and killed 25 of the residents only for the fact that due to their own stupidity the partisans could not do anything with the police battalion located in the village.

On April 19, 2008, activists of "Memorial" installed there a cross of Euphrosyne of Polotsk. The very next day, the local authorities have dismantled it, and after a while the Belarusian Themis rather harshly punished some of those who were involved in the installation. So, Vyachaslau Siuchyk got "15 days in jail for the cross".

Punishment, by the way, is quite symbolic, because the cross, which is carried by Mr. Siuchyk in his life, many people can't understand.



ALENA TANKACHOVA

Prepared for publication 5.02.2011

Frankly speaking, regarding Alena Tankachova's activity after the events of December 19, 2010, I assumed that she belonged to some particular political wing. I was even more convinced in that after the police and KGB searches in her apartment. It turned out that I was mistaken. Human rights activists today are "repressed" in order to make it easier to make pressure on others...

New colour

I want to start with colours of heaven, which from the very birth (February 10, 1970) became something more than "the sixth ocean" for Alena Tankachova. That ocean was native element of her father, who served in naval aviation.

Barys Tankachou was once considered one of the best experts on military aviation accidents and retired from the post of chief engineer of the Baltic Fleet aviation.

It is clear that although Alena Tankachova was born in Kaluga, she started to learn the geography of the former Soviet Union not from textbooks, but from constant relocations, usual for the military men. For example, during high school she had to change schools for seven times.

The last of them was the high school number 3 in Belarusian town of Bykhau. Many knew that during the First World War there was a staff of supreme commander there, but not everyone knew that in Soviet times the Naval Aviation Division of the Baltic Fleet was situated there as well. In half an hour aircrafts were able to carry out their "missions" over the sea. Another thing is how reasonable it was.

Maybe it is one of sources of attempts to of our modern authorities to make our country a "maritime power". They really have reasons, but only lack common sense. Otherwise the authorities would understand that we can not use all the shortcomings of the Soviet era for our sovereign reality. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania once had access to the Black Sea as well, but no one today has any kind of ambitions targeting the Black Sea.

Alena Tankachova's father came to Bychau after studying at the Zhukovsky Academy graduate school, from which he graduated with a gold medal. He was offered to stay and teach in the Academy, but Boris has always been fond of not theory but practice. Sure, not every man choosing between the capital of the Soviet Union and the Belarusian province may prefer the latter.

Alena's mother Galina Tankachova was a classical wife of a Soviet officer, that is, a housewife. By the way, in those days they did not watch endless television series. And not because they didn't exist at all yet. There was another reason — they hadn't enough free time for that.

New surprises

Alena Tankachova spent her last two school years in Bykhau. Of course, she felt the difference between the level of Moscow and Bykhau schools, but in her family it was never discussed, so she had nothing of the "girl from the capital"complex. As you know, one thing is how you feel about it, and quite another — how the others do.

In 1985 in Belarus pupils still wore traditional brown uniforms, but in Moscow it was possible to dress to your taste. Alena had a beautiful blue suit, but two weeks later she was "suggested" that she needed to dress "like everyone else".

She didn't want to get back to the past and asked her mother to help her. She sewed a beautiful dress of brown cloth for her daughter. On the one hand, it corresponded to the dress code, on the other — it was "not from the store". In short, the solution was found, which conspicuously explains why the wives of military men were called reliable "home front".

The following year, Chernobyl nuclear power plant exploded. If we consider that in the division there was the whole unit of "chemists" and the aircraft was equipped with missiles with nuclear warheads, the military were well aware of what happened, but... none of them left.

Moreover, the festive events of May were attended by the whole garrison (families and children). Why? Alena Tankachova heard the answer to this question from his father much later. He explained — there was a hard order. Authorities feared that the locals would begin to panic.
Last duty station of Barys Tankachou was Kaliningrad, which housed the headquarters of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. The post he took there implied the rank of General, but to get that rank he had to go to Moscow again. Alena's father did not want to, because he thought service career was not the most important thing in life.
In Alena's family there were quite different ideas about what profession she should choose. The "compromise" was journalism, because the girl had already written for the local paper. She was given the recommendation for admission without any problems. Alena Tankachova was brought by her parents to the journalism faculty of BSU. But as soon as they left Alena took her documents away and applied to another faculty — the historic one. She liked it more. Then everything happened like in a terrible nightmare. At the first entrance exam (completely unexpected for her) Alena Tankachova got mark "two"...

A new direction

It's even difficult to imagine what she had experienced. It was almost impossible to confess to parents, because she made the decision independently and completely contrary to their priorities. For example, Barys categorically opposed to her choice of history, since he knew what Soviet ideology did with the history.
Alena Tankachova started looking for options for continuing the studies and applied to the legal department of the Soviet trade college. Thus fate showed her the way to the things which aftrewards became the most important in her life.
Studying in college meant that two years later a person could become a "mid-level lawyer": for example, to do some work in the office of the court or to get a job of counsel at some enterprise. It is clear, that entering the college (especially with the school "silver" medal) was easy. And only after that Alena Tankachova told everything to her parents.
She graduated from college with distinction and immediately enrolled the Law Faculty of BSU. It is interesting that she studied along with the future deputy of presidential administration Natallya Pyatkevich. And

one of her examiners in the first year was Ryhor Vasilevich, who heads the Prosecutor General's Office and in a very special way protects the priorities of legality now.
Incidentally, among her university lecturers was Professor Iosif Yuho, who was the only one at the law department to lecture in Belarusian language, and Ala Sakalova, who now teaches students in the European Humanities University. Alena Tankachova is grateful to them for understanding the philosophy of jurisprudence.
In a way she was lucky. Alena Tankachova studied at the time when the spirit of freedom began to reign in the Law Faculty, and science itself got rid of Soviet ideological shackles. One of her favorite subjects was constitutional right. After graduating from BSU she even made an attempt to go to the graduate school, but... There was a referendum in November 1996, and the main law of the country changed radically. It became clear that ideology started to return to jurisprudence.

A new way

A symbolic thing here is the fact that thanks to this attempt Alena Tankachova became interested in the business she is doing now. I mean the "third sector", because the topic of her thesis (which hadn't been written) was connected with public organizations.
Her personal debut was the creation of the Independent Society for Legal Research in 1996, which in 2004 was forcibly liquidated by Belarusian Ministry of Justice.
Maybe it is a coincidence, but the process of liquidation started after this organization had participated in more than 50 litigations concerning public organizations closed by the Ministry of Justice. I think many of us remember the massive "clensing" of the "third sector", held after the presidential elections in 2001.
For Ms. Tankachova's associates it was made clear that potential attempts to register the new organization had no chance, so they decided to start a fund. So, the Innovation Fund of legal technologies was created.
Former special professional purposes (work in the courts) were now accompanied by new activities — legal assistance, judicial reform, access to information, advocacy. Thus, the effect was the opposite to the one expected from the liquidation of their organization.

Some additional components appeared in the activities of Alena Tankachova and her colleagues. Here I mean the active publishing program, aimed at dissemination of standards of human rights. Despite all the difficulties, the materials published by them today can be found in every library of every faculty of law in Belarus. You can add to these activities two-week trainings on Human Rights for law students, which had been held in Germany for many years.

It is clear that it wasn't appreciated by the authorities, and in 2006 these trainings were stopped. I do not know exactly who among the "top" mistakenly believes that in order to stop people it is enough to eliminate the organization that formally unites them. If it were so simple, then any dissent in our country would have been eliminated five years ago. And nobody would have been registered in the Czech Republic and Ukraine.

By the way, Ukrainian friends suggested Alena Tankachova to register in their country. So, the Development Fund for the right technology, which finally managed to get a registration certificate in Belarus as well, appeared. Today, their name is the "Legal Transformation Center" institution.

The things that happened after the last presidential elections will still be the major focus of attention not only for lawyers but also for psychiatrists, so we won't draw your attention to this now. We will note only that the wave of repression could not avoid Alena Tankachova as well.

On December 29, 2010, she was invited for questioning by the KGB, and then there was a traditional search. Even things that had absolutely nothing to do with the events of December 19, were taken away. Apparently, the habit of "grabbing"everything has become a vital instinct for some people.

Belonging to the "third sector" gives the possibility, if necessary, to avoid the rigid party discipline. For example, during the last presidential election Alena Tankachova received a job offer from the election headquarters of three different candidates. She refused thrice, citing the fact that she would be more useful being completely independent.

But those who have membership cards, could not do the same. More than once I have heard the refrain: "The party said "it is necessary".

Of course, one can't say such things to Alena Tankachova. Moreover, she is even ready to oppose the present opposition, if they, having achieved the power, will also violate human rights. Personally, I really like this approach, because it is the way it should be.

ALEH TRUSAU



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It is hard to imagine but it was ... Zianon Pazniak who made Aleh Trusau to become a Communist. Before that, Trusau had refused twice. The first time, he was offered to become a member of the CPSU already in the university. When he worked in the Special Scientific Restoration Workshops of the Ministry of Culture of the Byelorussian SSR, Zianon Pazniak suggested that Trusau became a Communist. He gave the following reason for this: "You must join the Communist Party and lead the defense of the Upper Town there". It was in 1979.

Mstsislau Roots

Aleh Trusau was born on 7 August 1954 in Mstsislau. At some time in the past, it was the main town of the principality of the same name that later became a voivodship.

I often heard about the Russian origin of Trusau. Something like, the Belarusian Language Society is headed by an ethnic Russian. Indeed, the father of Aleh Anatoljevich was from [Russian] coast-dwellers; he was born on the border of the Vologda and Arkhangelsk regions. And his mother was from the noble family of Drazdouski and Miazhevich. However, since she was born in the Urals where the grandfather of Trusau worked at that time, she was recorded as a Russian in her passport.

So Aleh Trusau is not only an ethnic Belarusian but he is also a descendant of the Belarusian gentry. Moreover, he himself, though he traveled a lot around the world, never lived abroad for a long time.

It happened so that Trusau's parents divorced early. The boy was only four and a half years old when he was left in Mstsislau to be brought

up by his grandmother and great-grandmother. His father went back to Vologda. The son never saw him again and learned only recently that he had already died. His mother went to Kobryn. Aleh was seeing her only once a year.

His great-grandfather (born in 1882) raised the boy in a "pre-Bolshevik" spirit. She lived exactly one hundred years. Through such education Aleh Trusau learned the Mstsislau dialect of the Belarusian language in his childhood and, when he now opens the dictionary of Nasovich, he finds there some words of his youth.

In 1961, Aleh Trusau went to the school (a former gymnasium and later the Belarusian pedagogical college where Arkadz Kuliashou and his grandmother Hanna studied) that his grandfather built in 1908. Unfortunately, despite the protests, the teaching process in this school is now carried out entirely in Russian.

After finishing the school with the gold medal, Aleh was admitted in 1971 in the History Department of the Belarusian State University with a firmly set goal to become an archeologist. He dreamed of it since his first grade when he was able to get to excavations for the first time. The sub-department of archeology was opened in the BSU in 1973, as if expressly to satisfy his dream. Trusau was its first graduate in 1976. He got his postgraduate work assignment to the Special Scientific Restoration Workshops of the Ministry of Culture of the Byelorussian SSR where in 1980 he became head of the archeology department and worked there until 1994.

In parallel, Aleh studied in the correspondence postgraduate school of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the Byelorussian SSR. In 1981 in Leningrad, he defended his PhD theses on the "Archeological Study of Monumental Architecture of XI — XVII centuries in the territory of Belarus (methodological studies)".

Entering politics

Aleh Trusau went into politics in 1988 because of Mikhas Tkachou. This was how it happened. On 19 October, before a business trip, he was passing near the Red Church (the "Cinema House" at that time) heading to the train station to buy the ticket. He bumped into Tkachou who suggested that they stopped by this building. Like, a lot of interesting things were supposed to happen there and the ticket could be bought later.

This was how Trusau joined the organizing committee of the Belarusian Popular Front and two years later he was nominated to the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. He won the election and became the Deputy Chairman of the Commission for Education, Culture and Preservation of Historical Heritage. And he was among those members of parliament who went on hunger strike in the meeting room of the Supreme Soviet.

In March 1991, the Belarusian Social Democratic Gramada was created. Mikhas Tkachou was elected its chairman and Aleh Tkachou became his deputy. A year later, after Tkachou's premature death, Aleh Anatoljevich would head the party and lead it until summer of 1995.

In parallel with the parties, civil society organizations began to appear on the forefront of perestroika. One of the first registered organizations was the Belarusian Language Society (BLS) that was created at the initiative of Nil Hilievich, a prominent poet and public figure, who was elected its first chairman. Aleh Trusau organized then a branch of the BLS in the Savietski district, which he led until April 1997 when he was elected the deputy chairman of the BLS. The position of the chairman was then held by Hienadz Buraukin.

At that time, and few people know about this, the BLS was for the first time threatened with eviction from its premises, which would have automatically entailed forfeit of registration and hence impossibility of legal existence and inevitable downsizing of membership that would mean inevitable disappearance from public space of such organization as the BLS whose vocation, by definition, was mass activities. By the way, that problem was solved by Minsk Mayor Uladzimir Jarmoshyn after his meeting with Hienadz Buraukin, then chairman of the BLS.

On 17 April 1999, during the VI congress of the BLS Aleh Trusau was elected its chairman at the suggestion of Hienadz Buraukin. Since then, Trusau is better known as a civil society activist than a politician.

The Belarusian Language Society

Mechanically (the Belarusian language, the white-red-white flag, and the coat of arms "Pahonia"), the BLS is perceived as something very close to the Belarusian Popular Front. In fact, the Belarusian Language Society is much wider than one movement. The political affiliation does not mean anything here. There were and still are Communists and sitting ministers among the members of the organization. Nobody asks

new volunteers about their party affiliation nor ethnicity or religious affiliation. The only criterion is love of the Belarusian language. As you know, even the Belarusian Popular Front did not manage to avoid a split. And in the BLS, during its twenty years of existence, there were no internal quarrels or splits as they have nothing to quarrel over and they have something to fight for — specific and spiritual — for language.

By the way, political parties hold the BLS in high respect. Today, the organization has five and a half thousand members. This is the figure for the Ministry of Justice as it includes only the most active ones. The actual membership is much wider.

In Aleh Trusau's opinion, the "third sector" has much better prospects than the others in a totalitarian state. And it is hard to disagree with Trusau. What is the Polish "Solidarność" or the Lithuanian "Sajūdis"? They are not political parties but typical non-governmental organizations. And the Belarusian Popular Front was such an organization until it became a party. Trusau believes that the biggest political mistake of Pazniak and his team was the creation of the Party of the Belarusian Popular Front. The collapse began there. They should have first come to power.

For language, for Belarus!

When one talks about the BLS, it is impossible to bypass the issue of the current state of the Belarusian language. Some may find this opinion debatable but Trusau believes that the language is "being gradually reborn" today.

Personally, he began to speak Belarusian sometime in the early 1980s. His first Belarusian book was "The New Land" by Jakub Kolas that he received as a gift for the Soviet Army Day in the eighth grade. Trusau switched to the Belarusian language deliberately, in a protest against expulsion of some students for "manifestation of nationalism" (and in reality, for their love of their mother tongue and Belarus) from the Belarusian State University.

In order to understand Aleh Trusau's reasoning better we will quote from one of his many interviews: "Now the issue is purely political. We must wait for the change of the political regime. When the president and the prime minister will speak Belarusian we won't even have to change the law. Let there be two languages. I wouldn't change any law; I would only change the authorities. That's it. Two years later, most people will switch to the Belarusian language".

For Trusau himself the transition to the Belarusian language took exactly two years. Since 1982, he speaks exclusively Belarusian everywhere and to everyone. And he remembers well how he was treated in the Russian-speaking Minsk: people cursed in trolleybuses and shops and asked him to "speak normally". Today, the situation has changed dramatically. When people hear you speak Belarusian they let you jump the queue; even policemen express respect and some taxi drivers let you ride free of charge.

Trusau's proposals to switch all state agencies to the Belarusian language no longer provoke sardonic smiles. A sociological survey recently conducted by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies together with the laboratory "Novak" unexpectedly confirmed Aleh Trusau's optimistic perception of the language situation. The Belarusian language is seen as a national symbol and a national treasure by 83.7 per cent of the country's population. And about 50 per cent designated those who speak Belarusian as the nation's elite.

This result has been obtained in spite of centuries-long tradition of eradication of the language. In spite of the official policy of the last fifteen years. This is the result to which the BLS undoubtedly contributed a lot. And obviously, Aleh Trusau did.

Optimist

Unlike many earnest Belarusians, Aleh Trusau does not cry and whine about the disastrous state of the Belarusian language. You can say that he is fighting for it or rather he works methodically. Both as a strategist and as a rank-and-file member, depending on the situation and forgetting about his titles. He analyzes and evaluates the situation, the balance of forces and opportunities. He maneuvers and attacks. He holds the bridgehead and expands it inch by inch.

We obtained that the announcements in the public transport are made in the Belarusian language — a flag on the language map of Belarus. We replaced the streets signs with the ones written in the Belarusian language — yet another flag. We organized the Belarusian language courses at the BLS — for the better. We launched the wide campaign "Let's Be Belarusians" jointly with other civil society associations — a success.

If he needs to speak to officials he won't bat an eye to do this. To sit at the table of a public commission at the presidential administration —

without hesitation. However, his first blunt question will be about the language and the democratic reforms.
But when he needs it he will go into a frontal attack, without hesitations. For example, when the BLS again faced the threat to be deprived of the premises. The district administration retreated under the impact of a wave of protest. And the BLS was the first to ring the alarm about the danger of manipulations with the question about the mother tongue before the census.
To be flexible and not to betray his principles and himself. It looks like Aleh Trusau manages to do it.



ULADZISLAU VIALICHKA

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When in November 2010 Ulad Vialichka was elected the Speaker of the "Eastern Partnership"Civil Society Forum in Berlin, he was a little confused. It was not because he did not have the necessary experience. Quite on the contrary. There was another surprise: the previous year this organization was also headed by a Belarusian and from childhood we were all taught that a shell is not falling into the same shell hole twice. Especially taking into consideration the fact that the forum included 17 people from 6 European countries and the choice was wide.

First lessons

I'll traditionally start not with that episode, but with the very first one in the life of Uladzislau Vialichka. He was born on September 12, 1973 in Minsk, and almost never said goodbye to his native city. He studied at the school No.138 on Adayeuski Street in Frunzenski city district of Minsk.

The school was a usual one, that is, without any "specializations", but Uladzislau was lucky to learn from the well-known teacher-innovator Siamion Kaplan. This was a very serious thing, because they had eight lessons of history a week.

Thanks to his teacher Vialichka developed his first oratorical skills and ability to think, as well as got the history department of the Pedagogical Institute. He was admitted without passing entrance examination, because he finished school with a "gold" medal. Also, in that way the state supported "teachers-innovators", whose mark was equal to the one at the entrance exam. Now something similar is happening to the winners of various competitions.

We can say that Uladzislau Vialichka was lucky to study in the best of times — in years 1991-1995, when the national revival was blooming. The Belarusian historical science recovered, and Maxim Gorky City Pedagogical Institute "turned" into Maksim Tank State Pedagogical University. The graduates of 1995 became the only ones to receive diplomas with "Pahonia".

By the way, during his university studies Mr. Vialichka got involved into "the third sector", as he was taught by people who tried to implement some new methods in science, especially in childern's camps. The student group gladly joined this work, resulting in the training in Germany. There they understood how one can build different educational process or work with young people outside of school. In a way, it was an absolute insight, another world of pedagogy. Further 15 years of his life would be devoted to this work.

Specific lessons

Uladzislau Vialichka's father Uladzimir unfortunately passed away. He was, without exaggeration, a locksmith by God. He worked on the famous (not only in Belarus) military factory No.32, located on Valhahradskaja Street.

If the father took the collapse of the Soviet Union very close to heart, the mother wasn't dissapointed at all. Tamara was economist by education. She began her career in the Executive Committee of Frunzenski City District. Then she worked at the Ministry of Trade of Belarus, and when an independent banking system started to be created, she was invited to work in the "Belarusbank". She retired after working as First Deputy Chairperson of "Belgazprombank".

Uladzislau met his future wife by chance. Their common friends were married and invited Alena and Uladzislau as witnesses. As it turned out, the parents of future leader of the "third sector" of Belarus met just the same way. In 1997 Ulad and Alena married at Minsk City House of Marriages.

Alena graduated from Minsk Institute of Foreign Languages. Now, she is also engaged in social activities: more precisely, in the non-formal educational work, or even more precisely — the "Swedish" communities, as well as the cultural and educational programs for women.

She has also one very "specific" interest. She is an expert in the Chinese "tea ceremony". By the way, it can be said that this hobby became a part of Alena's social life, because last year with her friend she organized the "Nonrandom meeTEAngs" project. Every week on Wednesdays they invited famous people — musicians, poets, sculptors, philosophers, artists, directors, writers and producers to have some tea and to talk on different topics.

Today there are several projects of a kind in Minsk, which Uladzislau Vialichka really likes. These projects are not funded by any foreign grants. It's a simple, clear and understandable self-organization of real people.

Communication lessons

For Uladzislau Vialichka they began immediately after the above-mentioned studies in Germany, because then it became absolutely clear that in order to implement non-formal education in Belarus, one had to do something new. In 1995 he took an active part in the creation of the Youth Educational Union "Fialta" (it still exists today), which immediately implemented several programs. It turned out that those programs work not only in German conditions, but in Belarusian as well. Moreover, they were needed here.

In 1997 Uladzislau Vialichka together with his colleagues established a new organization — Education Center "POST", which he headed until last year. This is one of the most famous and recognized organization in educational circles. It generally works with young people, students and teachers engaged in the development and non-formal education.

Initially there was also work with schoolchildren, but pretty soon the authorities realized that this field should be covered by ideologically "right" organizations like The Belarusian Republican Youth Union. Certain difficulties appeared regularly, especially during election campaigns. But the thirst for working with people always made Mr. Vialichka to look for new forms.

In addition, non-formal education provides an understanding that in life one should struggle not for diploma, but for self-development. Unfortunately, today it often happens just the other way round, and the word "democracy" in fact is prohibited.

Maybe this was one of many large and small reasons for creating "EuroBelarus".

Lessons for the future

In 2007, when a new strategy for relations appeared, it became clear that Europe was going to work with Belarus in a different way. Some leaders of the "third sector", which by that time had a lot of experience in international cooperation and actively consulted among themselves, came to the conclusion that there were problems, that could not be solved by each of them individually. For example, gaining greater voice and influence of NGOs at the level of the Belarusian society and European institutions.

The international consortium "EuroBelarus" included a number of local organizations and some partners from Europe who share the idea of "cultural policy" formulated by the famous Belarusian methodologist Uladzimir Matskevich. And when the time came for "Eastern Partnership", the organization was really helpful.

Let me remind you that the first talk about the "Eastern Partnership" started in the fall of 2008. Then emerged the so-called Polish-Swedish initiative. Very soon it was supported by other EU countries. The official start of the program was also given at the Prague Summit the EU in May 2009.

Why Belarusian authorities have agreed to participate in the "Eastern Partnership"? Obviously, not for the sake of some democratic values. Very serious problems forced them to make such step. For example, Russian-Georgian war, which has put up a number of questions. One of them was about the way Belarus has to build relations with Russia, another — the economic crisis, as well as regular "gas" issues.

Whatever anyone says, but obviously two years before the bloody events of December 19, 2010 the Belarusian authorities had to change a little, but enough to become scared of any changes.

They planned to get money. Of course, the funds could have been provided, but it’s not something that can save the Belarusian economy. And the expected political legalization, which is now impossible, didn’t happen. Perhaps these were the reasons for the claims about stopping to participate in "Eastern Partnership"?

I will not talk again about the details of the Civil Society Forum establishing. I will only note that it was created at the initiative of the European Commission. Representatives of the "third sector" of the six countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and

Belarus) regularly give "feedback" on the program to national and European institutions.
The first Civil Society Forum was held in November 2009 in Brussels, the second one — a year later in Berlin, where Uladzislau Vialichka was elected the speaker. The third is scheduled for next November. It will take place in Poznan, because of the Polish presidency in the EU.
At the initiative of independent NGOs in Belarus, supported by other countries, the forum became not a temporary (once a year), but a permanent institution, which Belarusian authorities didn't like. They ignored the creation of Belarusian National Platform of the forum, tried to get the control of it, actively resisted it, but nothing happened. Attempt to replace the civil society with Social Advisory Council under the President of the Republic of Belarus failed.
This, in my opinion, is just the point of the main lesson for the future: the dissent should not allow to be controlled by those who think "right".



IRYNA VIDANAVA

Prepared for publication on 1.06.2012

Right as I began working on Iryna Vidanava's profile I knew it would never be published in the Novy CHas (New Time) paper. The reasons were purely ethical, as Iryna is the daughter of the editor-in-chief. However, I decided to write a feature on her because she really stands out in the Belarusian civil society.

Childhood

According to Iryna Vidanava, she had a wonderful childhood. It was not because she was born under the star sign of Capricorn on 10 January, 1978 but because she was lucky to have very good parents, elder brother and grandparents on both sides of the family.

She spent her childhood in an ordinary two-room flat in Kurasouščhyna district of Minsk. The atmosphere in the family was not dominated by a patriarchal hierarchical relationship, where children are completely subordinated to their parents. Instead, love reigned supreme. Nobody shouted or moralised. The parents talked to the children, discussed things with them, sometimes being ironic. Everyone listened to each other, no matter how old they were. Books on the shelves were part of daily life rather than just interior decorations.

Iryna's father Alaksiej Karol explained to me that he and his wife had made a point of treating their children with respect, as if they had been adults, only with a bit less experience and knowledge.

This meant being attentive and affectionate to the children, never getting angry and not papping them up, either. In other words, just loving them. The children were not forced but encouraged to be self-disciplined and self-organised. With this type of relationship between

the parents and children, it is not surprising that Iryna and her elder brother Siarhiej have always got on very well, respecting each other and being true friends.

Iryna's father Alaksiej Karol, who actually came up with the idea of this series of profiles, is a well-known figure not only among journalists. He has a PhD in history and is a political analyst. Alaksiej Karol was among the founders of the social-democratic movement in Belarus. He was the editor of the *Zhoda* paper until it was closed down. Some time later he managed to launch an independent paper called the *Novy CHas*, something next to impossible in the last decade.

Iryna's mother Volha is a teacher of biology and chemistry, but she also knows literature and art very well. She used to work at the school of choreography. Volha is very kind-hearted, she is the sort of person who "saves the whole world", because she always helps people. Although she does not belong to any opposition organisation, she takes part in rallies and mass protests.

For nine years Iryna studied at School No. 119 that offered special training in music. The girl danced in the children's dance group *Ravieśnik* from the age of four. This was partially due to the influence exerted by her grandmother Lizavieta Polazava, who came from a family with French and Russian roots and believed that a girl had to be well-educated, which included playing a musical instrument, dancing and knowing at least one foreign language, whatever her profession might be.

Iryna enjoyed music and dancing on top of her standard school curricula. Moreover, later on all of her grandmother's values helped the girl to achieve professional heights and became part of her individuality.

The First Trial

After Iryna finished the ninth form she went to study at the lyceum affiliated with the Belarusian State University. She chose the department of history and philology, where the competition between applicants had always been very high. It had nothing to do with a "competition of parents". It was a new type of school at the time, created by people who had high ideals and wanted to lay the foundations for a seat of learning that did not only provide an excellent education but also brought up young people in the spirit of free thinking, self-government and freedom instead of a boring and formal Soviet-style school.

One detail would be enough to give an idea of what the lyceum was like. Amateur performances staged by the students always included parodies of the teachers, and the headmaster Hienadz Palchyk was no exception. The old boy network did not play any role there. Getting admitted to the lyceum was half the battle; doing well there was even more challenging.
Iryna became a student of the lyceum in 1992 and finished it in 1994. It was a time when Belarus had just gained sovereignty and was beginning to move to democracy, a time of a powerful movement for national revival, with numerous rallies, groups for Belarusian culture like Talaka and the first books by Uladzimir Arlou.
I have mentioned the highly esteemed writer because Iryna read his books while preparing for admission exams to the lyceum.
After the two years at the lyceum the girl had to choose between history and philology. In the end she made up her mind to take up history and went to study at the School of History of the Belarusian State University in 1994. When she was a student at university she got married and adopted her husband's family name, thus becoming Iryna Vidanava.
The early 1990s were marked by a new wave of Belarusisation, with a particular focus on Belarusian history and culture. At the lyceum the language of instruction was Belarusian. At university the students of the School of History could choose to be taught in Belarusian (and this was Iryna's choice) or in Russian. However, from her second year onwards, a lot of courses were taught in Russian, in spite of the students" protests. The administration claimed it was an exception and used all sorts of pretexts, like lack of Belarusian-language lecturers.
Soon the exception became a rule.

New Time

It is not the name of a paper. It is a whole period in Iryna's life.
Her promoter at the School of History was Paviel Lojka. He was a wonderful person and a true professional, who are becoming scarcer and scarcer nowadays. Unfortunately, a few years ago he passed away.
As a student Iryna Vidanava did all her research papers under his supervision and went on to do a postgraduate course. When she was still in her fourth year she was offered a teaching job at a school affiliated with the lyceum. Later on she taught at the lyceum and the Belarusian State University. Her subject was the history of Belarus in the Middle Ages.

Iryna continued her studies in the United States — not as an opposition activist, as might be expected, but by winning the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship grant in an open competition. It happened in 2004, when the regime in power was, to put it mildly, not at all enthusiastic about any foreign influences.

Iryna Vidanava received her master's degree in public policy and international relations from the John Hopkins University. Its campus is in Baltimore, Maryland, only forty minutes from Washington, D.C., where its School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) is located. At the graduation ceremony Iryna gave a farewell speech (it is a long-standing tradition that graduates elect the one to deliver this speech by secret ballot).

In order to gain practical experience Iryna combined her studies with working for a number of international research projects and leading think tanks. Besides, in 2006, the year of a presidential election in Belarus, she became a RFERL reporter from Washington.

Upon graduation Iryna Vidanava received several job offers in the USA but she preferred to come back to Belarus. She was once again offered a teaching position at the Belarusian State University, but she had a different vision of her future by then.

Admission Ticket

When she was a student Iryna once came to a meeting of the Association of Belarusian Students. This became her "admission ticket" to the third sector. In a conversation with the Chairperson of the Association Aleś Michalevich she mentioned that she had once considered studying journalism. He suggested to her becoming the editor of *Studenckaja Dumka* (Students" Thought) newsletter with a view to turning it into a fully-fledged magazine. It was time to say "oops!" as Iryna's only assets were the title, a brief history and archive of *Studenckaja Dumka* and Źmicier Vajciachovich, one of the founders of the Association who knew how to make a layout. Moreover, Iryna had no relevant experience.

So in 1998 she hitched herself to journalism, as she put it. In 1999 the magazine *Studenckaja Dumka* received an official certificate of registration, which was annulled in 2003 by the Ministry of Information.

The magazine was forced to go underground but in November 2005 it was completely crushed. The authorities made a big issue of the confiscation under the pretext that the printing ink allegedly contained poisonous substances.

Repression can stimulate creativity. In 2006 the editorial board revived the magazine in a new CD format. The digital magazine soon became popular with young people. It also changed its title and became *34 Multimedia Magazine*, or 34 Mag for short; keen Internet users are familiar with its website: www.34mag.net.
I have heard all sorts of explanations for the new name, so I would like to put an end to the discussion by quoting Iryna Vidanava, "The logo of *Studenckaja Dumka* had two stylised letters, CD. To ensure continuity between the printed edition and its reincarnated version as a multimedia magazine on CDs, the editorial board came up with the title *34*, since C and D are the third and the fourth letters of the Latin alphabet.'

Destiny

I cannot agree with a popular opinion that all developments in our lives depend on "random chances". There is such a thing as one's individual choice and will. If Iryna Vidanava had not met Aleś Michalevich in 1998, she all the same would have sooner or later got engaged in NGO activities. To be more precise, Iryna would have joined the NGO segment that supports the opposition, because people of her type by their nature cannot accept the dominant values.
In 2000 Iryna Vidanava was offered the position of the international coordinator of the Assembly of NGOs, which she held until 2002. She still remains the Assembly's consultant. During the 2001 presidential election Iryna was the coordinator of the civil campaign "Elect!" Hundreds of organisations that belonged to the Assembly joined the campaign. It was only logical that when the Eastern Partnership programme was launched Iryna participated in all its events.
In 2003 *Studenckaja Dumka* launched a youth campaign called *Make. Yourself*. Its major media partner was *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii* paper with its editor-in-chief Julija Sluckaja. She believed in the idea and the enthusiasm of her colleagues from a minor independent magazine and allocated the front page of a highly popular paper to the campaign.
Teams of young people were invited to share their Belarusian dream. Within a week about 600 youths sent 149 essays describing their dreams of a future for Belarus. Thousands of people followed the campaign online and in *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Belorussii*. The award committee selected seven most creative teams, who were invited to a series of master classes in Minsk.

They spent five days working on scripts for video and audio clips to represent the young generation of Belarusians with their aspirations. The world-famous tennis player Maksim Mirny read the text for the winning audio clip. The video clip that won the first prize finished up with the following words, "Don't wait for your moment to come! Create it yourself!'

The next day after the results of the competition were announced, the Ministry of Information annulled *Studenckaja Dumka*'s registration. Perhaps in the eyes of the office holders the young people's dreams were wrong and did not meet the party line of the Belarusian Youth Union.

Unfortunately, I have seen more than once people clinging to their positions. Iryna Vidanava, by contrast, din not only leave her job as the editor-in-chief of *34 Multimedia Magazine*, remaining only the founder, but did all she could to bring in a new younger team. This is certainly something unusual for our times.

The ability to appreciate new ideas and put them into practice in spite of all sorts of challenges is another feature of Iryna Vidanava's character. A project for a free municipal paper had been nurtured for years before the Ministry of Information early in 2011 finally denied registration to the new independent media outlet after a long battle.

This, however, did not bring the creative process to an end. Early in 2012 a new online magazine called CityDog.by came into being. Its popularity with the readers is growing.

I cannot help being amazed by the number of fields in which Iryna Vidanava works. She is an editor and manager, an analyst and expert on the new media, youth policies and the development of civil society in general. She has written the first-ever course book on public policy in Belarus. It is intended for university students, first and foremost for the European Humanities University, where Iryna teaches. On top of that, she is a consultant of Lazarski University in Warsaw and a member of the Board of BAJ.

Iryna's contribution is highly valued by all the organisations she has worked for, because she has always shown excellent performance in every field. But it seems to me that her priority is journalism.

There has recently been much talk about the Internet killing the printed media. In the past the same was said about the radio and TV, the cinema and theatre. The outcome, to my mind, is going to be the same. Just look at Iryna Vidanava, a pioneer in multimedia magazines and online media, who keeps looking forward to each new issue of the printed paper edited by her father.



ALEH VOLCHAK

Prepared for publication on 23.01.2010

Recently, there was the successful first run of the movie Defiance by the Oscar-winning director, Edward Zwick, about the activities of the Jewish guerilla detachment of Bielski brothers in Belarus. I was told about this detachment as well as about other unexplored facts of history a few years before the first run of the movie by human rights defender Aleh Volchak, a prominent lawyer and not a professional historian. He believes in the uninterrupted continuity. And if you want that the past does not shoot you with a pistol, you need to know it at least.

The last of his mother's family

The story of Aleh Volchak's life began on August 2, 1967. His mother JadvihaVolchak was originally from the village of Shchasnavichy near Liakhavichy. And his father (stepfather) Aliaksandr Zasulievich was from the village of Vialikaja Lipa in Klietsk district, Minsk region. When his mother got married and took her husband's family name she decided to leave her maiden name to Aleh because he was the last from the Volchaks family. Aleh's brother Dzmitry who is younger by six years is already Zasulievich.

It was a typical family of builders. There was hard work, simple life and, one would think, a preprogrammed path for children. Aleh studied in School No. 128 in Minsk, in the same school with the disappeared journalist, Zmitsier Zavadski. And they lived on the same street, in the next house but one. But Aleh learned about it only many years later when he already became a human rights activist.

School No. 128 was an ordinary proletarian school without any area of concentration; this was why it did not left any extraordinary impact in

the child's memory. Unlike the famous Minsk children's railway where Aleh worked with great eagerness every summer from the fifth to the eighth grade. Later, he studied in the railway vocational school No. 34 where he received the profession of mechanic.

Aleh actually returned to his vocational school after his compulsory military service. He worked in the Minsk subway and, at the request of the vocational school's administration, he organized a memorial club for peacekeepers "Young Patriot" there. In fact, it was the first NGO in Aleh's life.

Aleh did his military service in Tajikistan, in the Pamir Mountains (2,200 meters above the sea level), at the outpost of the Khorog border detachment of the Soviet Army. It was considered to be a combatant detachment because the border with Afghanistan was nearby and shooting was frequent. Exemplary soldiers were sent to help the "brotherly people of Afghanistan" on rotation basis.

After two months of service, Aleh Volchak got this "honor" (in the Soviet time this word was not put between quotation marks). He spent less than a month in Afghanistan. During the first major military operation an epidemic of infective hepatitis ("jaundice") began among the "shuravi".

Soldiers believed that it was belong their dignity to show their disease to their superiors. Commanders knew that Volchak was ill only when he lost consciousness. He was evacuated to a military hospital in Dushanbe on the same flight with the wounded and the dead.

The City Council instead of the KGB

The border troops were then subordinated to the KGB, so many ex-servicemen of the border troops sought to get in the KGB structures. They wanted more romantics. But Volchak was disappointed in the well-known in Minsk "KGB school": they admitted only those with the higher education. "I can say I was lucky", Aleh believes now.

In the KGB, they advised him to enter the Law Department of the Belarusian State University. Like, if you still feel like joining us later, we'll take you. But for Aleh, this desire never reappeared.

Already in the fourth year of the Belarusian State University he set his mind to become an investigator. For the sake of gaining experience he began working as a voluntary assistant in the Prosecutor's Office of the Frunzienski district in Minsk. One year and a half later, despite the

lack of diploma, he was offered the position of senior investigator. And he was immediately entrusted with five criminal cases one of which was a contract killing (and the beginners are rarely entrusted with such cases).

During five years of work, investigator Aleh Volchak successfully brought to court nearly one hundred criminal cases including five crimes (one of them with a murder) committed against policemen. Everybody knew that it was impossible to cut a deal with the Afghan War veteran. He was respected for this. Former Prosecutor General Aleh Bazhelka once named Aleh Volchak the best investigator of Belarus.

Volchak was always interested in politics and public life so it is fully understandable why in 1995 he decided to run for a seat in the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation. However, as you may know, the elections in almost all Minsk constituencies were declared void. Next autumn Volchak was elected to the Minsk City Council. It is interesting that he was running in the same constituency with Hienadz Karpienka who was then elected to the parliament.

At the very first meeting of the new convocation of the City Council Aleh Volchak came forward as a candidate to the position of chairman but the nomenklatura decided otherwise. And they were right in their circumspection. A year and a half later city councilor Volchak initiated hearings against policemen who had beaten participants of opposition rallies. And in 1999, he accepted the proposal of Viktar Hanchar to join the alternative Central Election Commission.

On 10 September 1998, the Belarusian Ministry of Justice registered the public association "Legal Assistance to Population" created at the initiative of Aleh Volchak. After disappearance of Jury Zakharanka, on the instructions of the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces, Aleh Volchak led a public commission to investigate circumstances and causes of this incident. Its conclusion made soon after the incident was distressing: General Zakharanka was unlikely to be alive.

First steps

On 16 September 1999, unknown persons forcibly abducted Hanchar and Krasouski. It became clear that the authorities had their own understanding of morality.

The next morning, 17 September, Aleh Volchak arrived to the infamous baths on Fabrychnaja Street where the crime had taken place. He was

the first to record on his personal camcorder broken glass, blood on the pavement and red paint on a tree from the car that had blocked the SUV of Krasouski.

The version of a Belarusian adaptation of the Argentinian "death squads" was formed in public mind. Further "disappearances" stopped only because of the publicity in the cases of the disappeared persons, and the credit for this should also be given to the association of Aleh Volchak.

But the human rights defenders did not take care of political cases only. Just the day after the tragedy on Niamiha parents of the deceased found Aleh Volchak and asked him to defend their rights in court. It took place on 31 May 1999.

The events around the terrible tragedy showed clearly how the relations between the individual and the state are being formed in the Belarusian reality. And they also clearly showed that the "third sector" could not be controlled by the authorities; otherwise they would no longer be independent public organizations, NGOs, but something else.

We will remind that commenting on the events on Niamiha the authorities put all blame on the rain and drunken youth who "had fallen there on their own". These words angered the bereaved parents and made them seek help. Lawyers of the "Legal Assistance to Population" investigated the circumstances, questioned dozens of people and came to the conclusion that the main cause of the tragedy was incompetence of the police: they deployed their forces in a wrong pattern and violated security measures.

They managed to turn around the investigation that lasted two years: policemen and city officials were officially found guilty. If the principle "Scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" have worked, the outcome would have been diametrically opposed.

Fate behind statistics

More than eighty per cent of all activities of "Legal Assistance to Population" regarded the social sphere. Human rights defenders were engaged in family and household problems, inheritance matters, and provided help in different conflicts. The organization existed five years less one day. On 9 September 2003, Judge Zhupikava finally annulled the official registration.

During this time, eight thousand citizens of Belarus got help from the organization. More than sixty lawyers acquired qualification there and work in different (including governmental) bodies today. Representatives of "Legal Assistance to Population" took part in nearly two thousand lawsuits and helped to win many of them. They regained apartments, got people reinstated in their jobs, got back benefits and compensations, initiated administrative proceedings against officials etc.

It is a paradox but it became much easier for human rights defenders to work underground. Certainly, while there is the famous Article 193-1, the threat of potential prosecution will always remain but nobody wants to play with professional lawyers yet. First of all, because the latter know very well: they do not violate any laws because they do not work on behalf of a non-existent organization but in accordance with their lawyers" diplomas. And they work absolutely free of charge, i.e. without any material benefit. By law, one does not need a license in this case.

And the relief is in absence of constant warnings of the Ministry of Justice and claims from constant inspections, such as the fire department or the tax authorities. The lack of an official status cannot impede them from helping people without seeking to profit from it.

By the way, finally, a new entry recently appeared in the workbook of Aleh Volchak. On 9 September 2009 (exactly six years later), "Legal Assistance to Population" was again registered by the Ministry of Justice but only by the Ukrainian ministry and not the Belarusian one. The registration of organizations beyond our government's control outside of the country became a trend. However, it happens not as a tribute to fashion but because it is impossible (or very difficult) to do it in today's Belarus.

I hope, just yet...

In 2005, former officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs founded the movement "Defenders of the Fatherland" named after Yury Zakharanka that was later joined by Afghan War veterans (Aleh Volchak is a trustee of the Zakharanka family). A year before, some of them (including Mikalaj Autukhovich) refused commemorative awards honoring the 20th anniversary of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. In their opinion, it was the main cause of imprisonment of Mikalaj Autukhovich.

On the eve of the International Human Rights Day I asked Aleh Volchak about possible fate of Autukhovich and I heard a disturbing answer: "The most unpleasant thing will happen when his sentence will be long and in one or two years many will forget this name".
Aleh Volchak and human rights activists do their risky job also to prevent something similar to the cases of Zakharanka or Autukhovich from happening again to anyone, and so that human solidarity does not disappear or weaken because it brings together people of goodwill against the evil.

IRYNA ZHYKHAR



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I sincerely respect this woman for her extraordinary courage, because not everyone is able to help others and at the same time to struggle with their own illness. I totally disagree with those who call women "weaker sex". Often they are stronger than the strongest. First of all, in the terms of spirit. Maybe that's why Iryna Zhykhar not only heads the Council of Belarusian Organization of Working Women, but over the last 10 years of life had participated in the creation of the public initiative "For the salvation of Kurapaty memorial", then — "For the freedom of religion". Now she is involved in the work of the social movement "Together against cancer".

First trials

I will start with Iryna Zhykhar's joke: "I do not remember how I was born". Therefore we will trust her passport data: it happened on August 11, 1966 in Minsk.

Her father's name is Vyachaslau. He worked as the director of trade stalls. Her mother Lyubou had no higher education and therefore had worked as a simple cashier at the same stalls with her future husband. They first met at work. Then there was a wedding, they lived together for less than ten years, but divorced not because he often couldn't keep his hands to himself. Lyubou couldn't stand another thing — unfaithfulness. It happened during the construction of housing cooperative. The court ordered the former husband to pay a considerable part of the "contributions" and to give half of the property, acquired together.

To put it mildly, the mother and daughter had difficult times. They had to let in 4 lodgers in an apartment of 45 square meters. Lyubou

started working on two jobs simultaneously. It is easy to imagine that she almost had no free time, but Iryna often saw her mother with books. She could not live without them. It was as fresh air for her.
Unfortunately, on April 5, 2010 Iryna's mother died. But this courageous woman managed to give her daughter at least two things — the love of books and the power that enables to overcome any difficulties.

Cancer chemistry

Iryna Zhykhar became a specialist in chemistry almost by accident. At first she went to the 47th school, but soon it was given sports bias — specialization in "swimming". And the children started to get "selected" there. It's interesting, that Ira passed those tests, but she didn't want to become "hope of the country in sports", and changed the school to the 40th one. And this school specialized in chemistry. The point is, that Iryna was engaged in sports gymnastics (her mother liked that), but then got disappointed in sports and turned to "folk dancing".
In the 40th school she saw real teachers with a God-given talent, and that greatly influenced her fate. Another very important point was that Iryna was not only a successful student, but also quite noticeable social activist. Komsomol committee of the school where she studied happened to become the artistic troupe of school theatre. Iryna's debuted as Duenna in "Cyrano de Bergerac".
Her interest in theater later manifested itself at the Pedagogical Faculty of Chemistry Department of BSU, which she enrolled in 1983. One of those who wrote the scripts for their performances, was a well-known political analyst Siargei Nikaliuk.
A few days after the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant rumors about its scale reached people. Iryna Zhykhar then studied in the third year and saw the real shock among the graduates. Urgent "redistribution" of the students happened, and all the "chemists" were sent to the "zone", which was left by the others.
I don't want to make any parallels, but I can't tell the full story without them. In Soviet times, like today, there was forced "distribution" of students. Just like today, those who did not want to obey the orders of "distribution", had (this is recalled by many people) to refund the money spent by the state for their education. Iryna Zhykhar couldn't afford that, therefore, in 1988 she went to work as a teacher of chemistry at Zvyanyatskae village, which is located on the border of Khoyniki

and Brahin districts. Nearby there was the repository of radioactive waste...

When she returned to Minsk and began to work in the new elite school, located in Serabranka, as a deputy director on educational work, Iryna Zhykhar was only 24. It is really small age for a "chief".

In 1993 she enrolled the graduate school of the National Institute of Advanced Training of Teachers, which then turned into the Academy of Postgraduate Education, and ... got ill. It was the first "oncology".

Steps in the "third sector"

Iryna Zhykhar pretty quickly got over the diagnosis, which doctors call metastasis cancer of the parotid gland. She didn't even prolong the status of "disabled" she was given immediately after the surgery. Of course, she needed spiritual power, extraordinary courage and God's help, which is given only to those who do not give up.

It was no coincidence that in this period of life Iryna Zhykhar had to start social activities. Quite often the trials of life make us more sensitive to other people's problems.

Ms. Zhykhar started her public activity with the environmental problems of Leninsky district of the Belarusian capital. More precisely, with a meeting with the director of Loshitsa park Yauhen Tserakhau, who was obsessed with order, cleanliness and beauty of his district.

Perestroika increased the activity of Belarusian society. Independent initiatives, movements, free trade unions, building committees began to arise everywhere, even in schools, including the one where Iryna Zhykhar was working.

The authorities, like today, immediately sought to take personal control of any initiatives and "promoted" there the "right" people. The same situation was with the headmaster of the school, but the pedagogical staff denied her confidence. And Iryna Zhykhar was elected to the building committee.

It was absolutely clear that she got a number of "enemies" in her school, especially after trying to understand the principles of distribution of the bonus pool. Moreover, in 1995 she was secretly fired.

Then there was the newspaper "Worker". Near the Editorial Office of the paper there was the office of public association "Belarusian Organization of Working Women". So, it is logical that soon Ms. Zhykhar became an activist of the organization. And she was apparently good,

because soon she was elected deputy chairman, and in 2005 she became the leader of this organization.

Thirst for freedom

There Iryna Zhykhar understood that in today's Belarus only "third sector" and social activities enable people to feel truly free, responsible for their actions.

The history of the Belarusian Organization of Working Women is typical of our time. After the strike on the Minsk metro (August 1995) a decree on the temporary cessation of activities of Free Trade Unions was issued. And since their work was completely transparent to the employers, the pressure was organized under the accusation of "terrorist activity".

And women were the first to suffer from it. On the one hand, they were forced to leave the free trade union, on the other — wanted to maintain their organization, as they had already experienced the benefits of public self-administration. Thus the public association "Belarusian Organization of Working Women" arose.

Today in the organization there are 270 members. Its activity was completely reformatted. If previously all the initiatives were coming from the "top" (the tradition of Soviet times), now they are coming from the "bottom". People stop being passive and begin to realize what social benefits they can bring through social organization.

A specific example here can be Iryna Zhykhar herself. In 2008, she was diagnosed with cancer again, this time — the breast cancer. All would have understood if she stopped her public activities. But she doesn't hide her illness and even tries to help others.

One of the activities of her organization is prevention of the disease at all levels. The "Environmental sentence" campaign is dedicated to the proper selection of foods, the "Healthy lifestyle", "Against Breast Cancer" campaigns — to the ways of fighting cancer, mobilizing all resources of the body to overcome it. They even made a "movie" about the main mammalogist in Belarusian Ministry of Health.

Moreover, Iryna Zhykhar personally wrote and distributed throughout Belarus the "Alive letter", where she not only told her story, but also gave others hope for the future. Work for the social rehabilitation of cancer patients and their loved ones is now becoming the main business of Iryna's life.

Controlled "liberalization"

The young would say that the "third sector" recently is "thrashed", and it would be right. The fact is that the Belarusian authorities are well aware that, despite the "Pyrrhic" victory, which they have achieved now, sooner or later they will have to deal with the "third sector".

Some believe that this was the reason for creation of a Public Advisory Council of the Presidential Administration, headed by Uladzimir Makey. The explanation is very simple: the need for European money.

It all started with the fact that after the first forum of the "Eastern Partnership" the following decision was taken: the negotiations between national governments and Europe should include representatives of civil society (to know what's going on). When the Belarusian authorities saw there an independent "third sector", they just put a condition that they won't stand it. The saddest thing is that Europe agreed to that.

At the second forum this political anomaly was paid attention to by everybody, and it became clear that the obvious nonsense will not last till a new meeting. That's the reason of the desire to create the "right" public. The one that will cooperate with the authorities.

It's logical that all who are against such public sector automatically become "wrong". Iryna Zhykhar is among them, because throughout all her life she strives for real freedom and personal responsibility before God.


ПЛАНЕТА ЦВЕТ

FROM THE BOOK "LIFE AFTER CUSTODY"



THE CHRISTIAN WAY

Prepared for publication on 25.10.2013

Reference Note: Vital Rymasheuski was born in Babrujsk on 3 March 1975. Married, has a daughter. Civil engineer; in 1997, he graduated from the Belarusian National Technical University.

One of the leaders of the campaign "In Defense of Freedom of Conscience and Religion in Belarus". Head of the Minsk city organization of the Belarusian Christian Democracy Party, co-chairman of the party's organizing committee.

One of the candidates in the 2010 presidential election. Beaten by riot police during the event of 19 December on Independence Square. Detained during the dispersal of the rally and placed in the KGB pre-trial detention center. Released on parole on 31 December 2010. Sentenced to two years of conditional imprisonment with a two-year probation term.

Apparently, the images of the bloody and bandaged head of the former presidential candidate, Vital Rymasheuski, who was defending the entrance to the building of the Central Election Commission, became one of the symbols of the brutal events of 19 December 2010. Their origin was immediately known: the police rubber truncheon, which is widely called the "democratizer".

Few people thought then that not only Vital Rymasheuski had been beaten by that truncheon but the entire Belarusian nation…

The National Choice

Vital Rymasheuski's childhood passed between Babrujsk where he was born and went to school and the village of Patsava Slabada in the Kirausk district where he passed his vacations. His mother Tamara

Aliaksiejeuna, whose maiden name was Komar, came from this village. The family of Rymasheuski is originally from the Hlusk district, or more precisely from the village of Biarozauka, where his father Anatol Iosifavich Rymasheuski was born. The father's parents (Vital's grandfather and grandmother) died early; this was why the little Vital passed all his vacations with his maternal grandparents.

He studied in an unexceptional secondary school No. 13 in Babrujsk and was always very interested in politics. Unlike many of his classmates he even liked political orientation classes. He was a leader of Little Octobrists and Pioneers but he failed to become a Communist Youth boss because at that time the membership in the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League became optional. The perestroika began and Vital Rymasheuski took off his Pioneer tie and told his teacher that he would not join the Communist Youth.

He was interested not only in exact sciences, which explained the creation of the world (mathematics, physics, chemistry), but also in those that we call the humanities, i.e. history. His road to the so-called "wholesome" nationalism began exactly from history.

Vital was always a patriot of his country; only, at that time, he understood that his country was not the Soviet Union but Belarus. Rymasheuski became a Belarusian nationalist.

It was the "fault" of Mikola Jermalovich (his books) and a teacher of the Belarusian language and literature, Liubou Novik, who taught in the last grades.

By the way, Vital did not become fascinated with the Belarusian language immediately. In the seventh grade, it was the opposite. He even stirred up a "riot" against learning the language (they had a bad teacher then — **author's note**). He claimed that there was no need at all to study it while the Russian was lingua franca in the Soviet Union and the Belarusian language was not widely used even in Belarus. His idea was supported by the entire class. And, as I see it, he did not do it for any ideological reasons. For ages, students always preferred to have as few classes as possible.

The "language riot" was pacified by the entire school management and three years later Liubou Kirylauna Novik was able to destroy this "language stereotype".

It is interesting that she was ethnic Russian by her origin and she used this point very efficiently. "I am Russian according to my passport but

I love and respect the Belarusian language, and you, Belarusians, do not know anything about it".
It was **VERY** difficult to refute such argumentation.
Later, when a girl said that "the Belarusian language was much worse when compared to the Russian", the entire class was indignant with her.
This is quite an indicative nuance. It speaks volumes about the kind of influence the teachers have always been exerting on people. Unfortunately, today, their credibility is no longer the one it used to be because teachers make a "backbone" of all electoral commissions in this country...
And one can only regret that the current head of the country apparently has not had such teachers...
Vital Rymasheuski always liked Minsk, which he was able to visit a couple of times in his childhood and where his aunt still lives. This was why, when the time came to leave his hometown he already had an answer to the question where he should go to study (his hometown did not have and still does not have a **SINGLE** higher education institution; currently, there are only branches of some universities). After the high school, he chose the Polytechnic Academy in Minsk or, to be more precise, its (very difficult) civil engineering department.
For those who do not remember, I will remind that the Belarusian Polytechnic Institute was created in the 1920s on the basis of the Minsk Polytechnic College. In 1991, it was reorganized into the Academy and in 2002, the famous "Polytech" became the Belarusian National Technical University.
As a committed nationalist, Vital Rymasheuski attended rallies now and then at that time. On the surface, everything seemed okay then. The red-white-red flag waved over the administrative buildings including the House of Government. Belarus existed as an independent country and from the standpoint of national patriotism there was probably no acute necessity to participate in political life. However, the events approached that would erase almost all achievements of those years.

The Political Choice

Vital was not able to vote against Lukashenka at the election of 1994, despite the fact that he was actively campaigning in favor of Zianon Pazniak among his friends in the university and his relatives, as he

was not yet 18 years old then. However, the populist from Shklou won then for a different reason. The former director of a Soviet farm was saying what the electorate wanted to hear and promising to restore the "order" quickly. A few years later, the "order" will become stability, which, in the opinion of many, is enclosed by barbed wire of self-isolation.

In the Polytechnic Academy, interest in and even obsession with the Belarusian language looked a bit strangely. One might even say that Vital Rymasheuski was a "black sheep". People who study there are of different mindset and they are very far from politics. Incidentally, teachers in the "Polytech" were much more politicized than students. When Rymasheuski was arrested for the first time, they took it pretty easy and some even supported him.

It all happened on the Freedom Day, 25 March 1996. The rally was supposed to be held on Independence Square but they were banned from gathering there. Everybody came to the Opera Theater and they started marching from there. Policemen were announcing through loudspeakers that the rally was banned, somebody shouted "You are yapping!" and Vital Rymasheuski said that only dogs yapped. It so happened that the Deputy Head of the Maskouski district department for internal affairs was behind him.

Saying, "I'll show you who the dog is" he ordered to grab the boy and dragged him to a police car with other policemen.

Rymasheuski spent almost two hours in the police precinct but in those days policemen were treating dissidents much softer than they do now. Vital was even released with a written warning but then they heard something over the radio, brought him back (from the steps), torn down the warning and issued a subpoena instead.

It turned out that at that moment Vincuk Viachorka learned about his detention and shouted into the loudspeaker: "If they don't release Vital Rymasheuski immediately, we will go to the police department to liberate him".

Later, there were summons to the prosecutor's office. Vital thought that it would be it. But he was wrong.

His journey into politics began with this detention.

At that time, he had only six months left in his studies (it was an accelerated graduation) and Rymasheuski decided not to attend rallies any more. Most likely, it would have happened this way if the

supervisor of the dormitory did not bring him (before the Chernobyl Way) a summons to the prosecutor's office. It was an obvious preventive action but it had the opposite effect to what one hoped for. If earlier Vital Rymasheuski was not going to go to the rally, he understood at that moment that he could not skip it.

During the Chernobyl Way of 1996, Vital submitted an application for membership in the Belarusian Popular Front (the movement, i.e. the public association, and not the party).

At that time, the attitude to political dissent of students was still softer. Sometimes, it even helped as most lecturers (good professionals) did not support the authority. In short, Rymasheuski reached the defense of the graduate thesis without any particular problem. There were no postgraduate work assignments then, but he had to struggle to become a legal resident of Minsk. He only got this status a few years later.

The Youth Front started its activities at that time. Vital Rymasheuski, despite some disagreements with Paval Sieviaryniets, became one of its leaders.

The Personal Choice

It is most interesting that Vital Rymasheuski was a staunch atheist in his childhood. So staunch that he argued with his grandmother on this point from time to time. In parallel with his initiation in politics, he was coming to faith. As you know, this is not something that can be taught. God reveals Himself to a man and from that moment we feel His existence.

We will leave the description of how it happened with Vital Rymasheuski outside of this essay; we will only point out that faith also helped to redefine his political outlook: from a committed nationalist to a Christian democrat for whom patriotism is an important but not the main value.

Already in 1996, he did not only dream of emergence of a Belarusian Christian democratic party but took part in the first (unfortunately, unsuccessful) attempt to create it together with Hienadz Hrushavy. He even suspended his activities in the Youth Front. Rymasheuski was elected the deputy head of the Youth Christian Social Union.

Then there was rather a unique situation. The attempt to create the "adult" party was not successful but its "youth wing" worked for several years. Moreover, because of his activity Vital Rymasheuski

became member of the Presidium of the National Council of Youth and Children Associations of Belarus. Before it was dissolved, it was rather an efficient "umbrella" structure.

At the same time, Vital Rymasheuski worked in the governing body of the Association of Young Politicians.

As you know, for youth structures it is difficult to exist without a "party roof". As no Christian democratic party was created then, the Youth Christian Social Union, by a majority decision of its members, became a "wing" of the United Civic Party.

Naturally, when the work began to establish the Christian Democracy, Vital Rymasheuski was invited to join the organizing committee. At that time, it already began its work and was notionally composed of two parts. One included renowned politicians of Christian orientation (Paval Sieviaryniets, Aliaksej Shein, etc.) and the other one was made of believers of different denominations. Invitations came from both parts at the same time.

It was in 2005, and a few years later, the founding congress was held where Vital Rymasheuski was elected co-chairman of the Belarusian Christian Democracy. From that moment, the Belarusian Christian Democracy holds its congresses annually but the Belarusian Ministry of Justice ignores them, each time denying the official registration to the party.

I think that you should pay special attention to this point. The question is about relations between Paval Sieviaryniets and Vital Rymasheuski. They parted their ways in the Youth Front in a not so positive fashion. The perennial problem of the Belarusian opposition is that quarrels and disputes always dominate there. Two persons cannot even make three steps together without going to different directions. At best, they will part their ways peacefully, and usually they will quarrel.

Sieviaryniets and Rymasheuski did not remain friends after the Youth Front, so when Paval invited Vital to the organizing committee of the Belarusian Christian Democracy, the latter took it with some caution. He agreed but decided to work not for a specific person but for those things that would be of unconditional value to Belarus.

For instance, Vital Rymasheuski was managing the project "Repentance". Soon, a dedicated web site and an online museum of former politically repressed people were created; they were able to record many last witnesses of the Stalinist repression.

One can recall the campaigns "I love Belarus" and collection of signatures (they collected the unprecedented number of more than 50 thousand signatures) in favor of changes in the law on freedom of religion. Vital was directly involved in their development and implementation.

The joint work influenced the personal relationship between two politicians in a very positive way. Moreover, when the Belarusian Christian Democracy elected Vital Rymasheuski as its candidate in the 2010 presidential election, it was Paval Sieviaryniets who led his election campaign.

I want to draw attention to the phenomenon of co-chairmanship. It is a unique phenomenon for Belarus. Everybody says that there should be no "parties of a leader" but a "party of ideas" should be created but in reality the opposite happens. Only the Belarusian Christian Democracy was able to reach compromise in this sense.

One can argue long enough about reasons for absence of official registration. Vital Rymasheuski believes that the main reason is that the party is not loyal to President Lukashenka and it is very difficult to disagree with this.

The Religious Choice

Since his childhood, like his many peers, Vital started looking for the meaning of our life. Usually, it "goes away" when you become 16 or 17 years old but Rymasheuski was an exception. Certainly, as many other youngsters, he was interested in different things but philosophical (religious) questions were the most important ones. If a person seeks God, Lord comes to him sooner or later.

It happened to Rymasheuski in 1996. It is impossible to tell this in a brief essay, so I will only state the fact that since that moment he changed his views radically from atheism to Christianity.

A month later, Vital came in earnest to the Orthodox Church because this was where we was baptized as a child. I do not want to touch upon issues of interfaith relations here but today, the authorities divided the believers into insiders and outsiders. They monopolized the Orthodoxy in some way and they treat all other Christian denominations with some caution. They see them as the origin for all those who are considered today to be a "fifth column".

It makes no sense to argue with this obvious lie for the reason that the Orthodoxy has been in our country long before someone invented

the "integration games" and even before Belarus was turned into the "Northwest Territory"... Another issue is that during the last 18 years people's faith in God became another political instrument...
To those who have doubts, I will remind that in 1514, an **ORTHODOX** Kanstantsin Astrozhski defeated the **ORTHODOX** Moscow army near Orsha.
By the way, this religious denomination is associated with his second higher education and his meeting with his significant other.
In 2002, Vital Rymasheuski became a student of the Moscow St. Philaret Orthodox Christian Institute and even almost graduated from it.
The word "even" means here that after four years of studies he was not allowed to defend his graduation thesis. And they could not allow him to do it because it was entitled "Church and the National Revival Movement in Belarus". Today, it is impossible to do it in Russia by definition because even the liberals perceived (and still perceive) our country as a part of Russia.
Vital Rymasheuski was trivially banned from defending his thesis with the motivation "for nationalistic ideas". Belarusian opposition politicians can only dream about such a "reward"...
As for his wife Nasta, they met in the St. Peter and St. Paul Cathedral but became closer during their joint study by correspondence in the Christian Institute. In 2009, their daughter Eva was born.

The Choice for the Future

According to Vital Rymasheuski, the most lamentable result of the events of December 2010 is that no conclusions have been drawn and many things have remained unsaid, both for the participants of the events on the Square and those who did not take part in them but made different statements later. This can lead to negative consequences in the next presidential election. Or, rather, during the "presidential election campaign" as we do not have any elections since long.
Not only politicians but also journalists and all those who are associated with the democratic movement should be blamed (in Rymasheuski's opinion — **author's note**) for what happened. If one does not draw conclusions from his own mistakes and does not pass judgment on what was good or bad, the situation can become even worse in the future.
If earlier the regime tried to destroy everybody, it does not do it today

in such an absurd and brutal way but gradually. Destruction became selective. They crack down on politicians and their organizations one at a time. In principle, such a "process" gives to some more "loyal" ones an option to stand aloof. Then they bother you less.

Today, the main issue in Belarus is the issue of solidarity. And it is not only the question of letters and parcels [to prisoners]. This is also necessary and important. The politicians must defend each other because one can be destroyed not only physically but also politically.

Unfortunately, it does not always happen.

Aliaksandr Kazulin is a striking example. Back in the time, not much was done to get him released; and even less was done for not allowing his destitution as his party's leader and betrayal as he was in prison.

It is sad but it continues to happen with other organizations and politicians.

If we turn the blind eye to this and help the regime, soon, there will be no independent democratic movement in Belarus at all.

Recently, one could hear quite often about disintegration of the Belarusian opposition into "the radicals" and "the constructive ones", its "pro-Russian" or "Pro-Western" groups. I fully agree with those who believe that such a classification is far from reality and artificial. And I will not be surprised if we find out one day that it was invented by today's special services.

WHITE-RED-WHITE LOVE



Prepared for publication on 27.11.2012

Reference Note: Nasta Palazhanka was born in Minsk on August, 2nd, 1990. She studied at secondary school No.73 (with advanced studies of German) and aesthetic school No.37 in Minsk. Since 2008 she has been studying politics and philosophy at the European Humanities University.

In 2008 Nasta was elected vice-chairman of the Young Front — the organization she had joined at the age of 14. In 2007 she was convicted under article 193.1 of the Criminal Code ("activities on behalf of a non-registered organisation"). The court issued a warning as a punishment then. Nasta has been repeatedly detained and had to serve administrative arrests.After the protest action on December, 19th 2010, Nasta was arrested at home at 3.20 a.m. The capture of the 20-year-old girl was held out by 15 KGB officers. She was kept in custody at KGB Pre-trial Detention Centre. She was initially accused of organization and participation in riots (art.293.1 and 293.2 of the Criminal Code). In the evening of 17th February, 2011 released on bail. On March, 30th the charges were reformulated for "the organization of activities violating public order and participation in such activities" (art.342.1 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus).

On May, 20th 2011 the judge of Frunzenski district in Minsk Zhana Zhukouskaya announced the verdict — one year of suspended sentence with one year probation.

Reference Note: Zmitser Dashkevich was born on July, 20th, 1981 in Belarus. Up till the age of 5 he lived in the Far East of Russia, in the town of Yagadnaye, Magadan Region. Then the return to Belarus and

lived in the town of Staryia Darogi. He graduated from school No.2 there and studied at Hrodna Agriculture Institute. After that he entered Vilnius Pedagogical University, Slavic Studies Department.

In 2001 joined the Young Front, in 2004 was elected its chairman. Repeatedly accused on administrative charges. In 2006 arrested on charges of "activities on behalf of a non-registered organization" (art.193.1 of the Criminal Code). Sentenced to a 1,5-year imprisonment

Zmitser was detained preventively on December, 18th 2010 in the street together with Edward Lobau, charged with "malicious hooliganism" in violation of the criminal article 339 p.3. On March 24th 2011 sentenced by the court of Maskouski District of Minsk to 2 years at a colony of general regime.

On August 28th 2012 at the Corrective Labour Colony No.13 in Hlybokaye ambulatory court sentenced Zmitser Dashkevich to one more year at the Colony for willful disobedience of the requirements of the prison administration (art.411.1 CC of RB)

We all show respect and appreciation of the courage of these young people, the author of this essay too. And I'd also like to add that as long as we HAVE such youth as Nasta Palazhankla and Zmitser Dashkevich, Belarus WILL HAVE future.

Nasta's Way

Nasta Palazhanka has lived in Minsk since her birthday. Her parents Galina and Uladzimir moved from Kirausk in order to have better life opportuninies for themselves and their kids.

Unfortunately, Galina died 16 years ago, so her husband had to take full care of the children.

Nasta's brother Siarhey is 9 years older than she is. He graduated from university with honours and now has a private business in the field of IT. Nasta's studies started when she entered the 1st form of secondary school No. 73 in Minsk. She'd probably have finished it but for two circumstances.

The first one's related to her membership in the Young Front — such problems as the police's visits and the criminal case in 2007.

The second circumstance was the fact that Nasta's school director was elected a deputy of the local Council. It happened so, that the two circumstances occurred almost at the same time.

And there's another moment, rather important in my view. Nasta and her director had opposite views on what was going on in the country. The latter was a convinced government's supporter, so, when she was "elected", there followed sort of a mockery at a spicy spot... The one once called "the seating spot" by the poet Sasha Chorny...

The school administration even refused to greet Palazhanka. Nasta tolerated it till her mid 11th form, and then decided to change the place of studying.

If you think this is the sort of things easily done in our "socially stable" country, you're wrong. Together with her Dad , Nasta visited many schools in Minsk. She was a good pupil (academic performance was not an obstacle), but, as soon as the computer database revealed "politics— and police-involved" problems, the schools would refuse immediately. Only the aesthetic school No.37 accepted Nasta. By the way, three of her friends joined Nasta as an act of solidarity, so rare nowadays. Especially considering the fact that it was the second half of the 11th graduation form...

The girl joined the Young Front in 2004. She was 14 then, a pupil of the 8th form. Though the grounds for it were ready much earlier. From her very childhood she wanted to know the real history of her country and speak her native language.

It's sad that this desire fell upon the time when all this was officially banned. Especially after the referendum of 1995, when "bilingualism" was established in the country. You don't need to be a nationalist to notice how rapidly anything related to Belarusian started to vanish, and the requirement "to speak in a normal way" became not only prevalent but almost mandatory.

A few months ago I happened to visit the well-known from Soviet times "House of Friendship". It was the first time in my life that I had to translate the word "the same" from Belarusian to Russian. Unfortunately, such things happen with young people nowadays.

So we can only try to imagine how often Nasta Palazhanka felt as if she was a white crow...

Some of her friends suggested that they should go and see how people were celebrating the Day of Orsha battle in the park near Yanka Kupala monument. She knew nothing about who organized the event. And that's how she met the guys from the Young Front. There she got to know about the principles and values of this organization, and shortly she attended her first Young Front Ruling Board meeting.

The first two years her father and elder brother were wary of her political activity. They even had serious quarrels because of it, especially after her first detention.
The "breaking moment" in their attitudes to Nasta's political activity was the filing of the criminal case on charges of activity on behalf of a non-registered organization. Nasta's father Uladzimir was asked to come to the Prosecutor's Office and informed that his daughter had become a suspect.
Nasta's father is a military political scientist by education. He studied at the KGB Border School of the USSR and he knew very well what could come out of that.
He was present at many of Nasta's interrogations. He understood that she was right and that she'd adhered to her truth.
He was impressed by the search that took place in their apartment while Nasta was absent. (He could hardly imagine such lawlessness.). He attended the trial. There were about three hundred people outside the building then. Ambassadors, journalists, and politicians were present in the courtroom. It was probably then that Uladzimir understood that his daughter was not alone and there were other people she was doing all that for. It all happened back in 2007. Due to the early age, the girl was issued a warning.
On graduation from the secondary school Nasta Palazhanka wanted to enter the Department of Philosophy of the Belarusian State University, but she understood the difficulties that could arise with her further studies in Belarus. Therefore, her final choice was the European Humanities University that works in Vilnius, being in exile.

Zmitser's Way

It's said in his passport that Zmitser Dashkevich was born on July 20th 1981 in the village Kushniary, Ivatsevichy District, Brest Region, but it's not quite true. The real birthplace of the future leader of "Young Front" was the village Bahutsichy, Yelsk District, Brest Region.
The thing is that Zmitser's parents were journalists, and they "wandered the world". They came to Belarus to visit their relatives. His mother was pregnant, and Bahutsichy village became his real geographical birthplace, but they put down his father's home village Kushniary on his birth certificate. That was allowed by the law. Zmitser Dashkevich himself told the author this story four years ago, while working on

the "The Awakeners" book. He also told me then how, after leaving secondary school in Staryja Darohi (his parents moved there in 1986), he spent a year studying at Hrodna State Agricultural University. And then he understood it wasn't "his cup of tea", and went to Minsk to enter the Faculty of Journalism of the BSU.

It happened so, that he failed to enter the university, but became a member of the Young Front and in autumn of the same year (2001) participated in a 250-day defense of the place of mass executions in Kurapaty.

In 2004 he protested against the results of the referendum that gave Lukashenka the right to be elected for the 3rd and 4th term of presidency. The same year Zmitser became the chairman of the Young Front.

Zmitser Dashkevich worked for Aliaksndr Milinkevich's team during 2006 presidential election campaign. He was one of the protests organizers and the leader of the tent camp on the October Square. In September 2006 he was arrested on churches of "activities on behalf of a non-registered organization" and on November 1st sentenced to a 1.5-year imprisonment.

On January, 23 2008 Zmitser Dashkevich was unexpectedly released from Shklou Colony. It was then that we got acquainted in person. And it was the first interview in my practice that started with frying some meat dumplings in my kitchen. They were quickly cooked and delicious, but that was not the case. It turned out that the young man actually lacks time for cooking and eating. And it wasn't a self-praise or showing-off information, it was a fact of reality.

I remember I had a thought then, that if such people come to power one day they won't play hockey in their working time... And during the conversation I realized one can never break the will of such people, as they truly (on the edge of fanaticism) believe in God and in what they are doing...

The events of December 19, 2010 are described in details in the book "Against the Flow" (in the essay about Eduard Lobau), so there's no use repeating them. I'll just mention that on March 24th 2011 the court of Maskouski City District of Minsk sentenced Zmitser Dashkevich to a 2-year imprisonment at a colony of general regime. But later somebody found it not enough.

On August 28th 2012 another year was added to Zmitser's term for "willful disobedience to the requirements of the prison administration".

On the way of ordeal

Zmitser Dashkevich met Nasta Palazhanka in 2004 while he was being released from Akrestsina Detention Centre. The ordinary acquaintance has eventually grown into love, and today, when (for well-known reasons) journalists can't talk to Zmitser himself, Nasta Palazhanka makes sure that he gets information and keeps in touch with the rest of the world. So, I asked her to tell what has happened in their lives since the verdict was announced.

— Right after the detention Zmitser was kept in the Temporary Detention Centre. Then he was transported to Zhodzina. Having spent a few months there, he was sent to "Valadarka" and then to Zhodzina again, and from there — to Horky Colony. On his 5th day there Zmitser got into solitary confinement. After that his lawyer wasn't allowed to visit him, and we knew nothing about what was going on there.

The Young Front activists organized an informational campaign in his support, rallies were held near the Colony with a requirement to let the lawyer in. The outcome included administrative arrests of participants, and I had to "celebrate" my birthday (August, 2nd — **the author's note**) in Dryblin prison.

After that informational and protesting rally the lawyer was allowed to visit Zmitser and we got the information about bullying, threats, insults he was suffering there. We tried to rebuff it, applied to the Correctional Department, the Prosecutor's Office, and different courts. As a result, the authorities "insured" Horky Colony administration and on September 19th 2011 Zmitser was moved again.

Probably, so that I was left in the dark and couldn't control how Zmitser was being moved, I was detained that very day with Ulad Yaromenka in Minsk for the event "The city is ours". They take my phone and send a message to all of my friends that they're taking us somewhere and I don't know where the trial will take place. It was done in order not to have any witnesses in the courtroom during the trial. Frankly speaking, I was surprised at the empty courtroom, as it's not customary for the Young Front. Even at the most dangerous times there must be at least one person present at trial. At least to hear the verdict.

The mothers of Mikita Lihavid and Edzik Lobau — being wise women — realized that we would be "given" administrative arrest and taken to Akrestsin street Detention Centre. I was sentenced to 12, and Uladz Yaromenka — to 13 days.

The police, who were sure no one knew our location, didn't take us straight to the Detention centre by bus, but dropped us near the entrance just as usual drunkards or homeless people uninteresting for the public, leaving our documents with the officer on duty.
At this moment Alena Lihavid and Maryna Lobava approached us. They told me about Dashkevich and helped to call my dad, so I told him about the arrest and asked to contact the lawyer and follow Dzima's movement as much as possible.
While I was serving the punishment, Zmitser was taken from one Detention Centre to another — Mahiliou, Vitsebsk, and so on. He was on the move for more than a week and finally ended up in Hlybokaye Colony.
— As far as I know, Hlybokaye prison is one of the most cruel in the country?..
— Yes. Before he was moved to Hrodna prison, we went through the toughest colonies in Horky, Hlybokaye and Mazyr.
So, at the end of September Zmitser arrived at Hlybokaye Correction Colony No.13 and spent almost a year there. Then another year was "added" for the detention regime violation. He was convoyed to Vitsebsk Detention Centre for a month, then — to Mazyr, where Zmitser spent a few months.
Then a sitting on his transfer to prison took place (Zmitser knew nothing about it). So, he appeared in Hrodna.
— The night of April 26th 2011 Volha Dashkevich died. She was just 53… How did you learn the news?
— Zmitser's father Viachaslau Uladzimiravich called to tell me. He told there was a trouble. I knew at once what had happened. It had been so painful for Zmitser's mother to bear his sufferings.
In the morning I went to the undertaker's and started preparing the necessary documents so that the court of Maskouski district in Minsk (where Zmitser's trial took place) let him bid farewell to his mum.
Zmitser was still at "Valadarka" at the moment, as his appeal was to be considered on May 5th.
The funeral was in two days, so we were pressed for time, and an urgent court decision was needed. I don't know who they consulted, but they gave the permission. As soon as i learned about it, I darted off to "Valadarka", but the administration had already left.
The next morning (April, 27th — **author's note**) the administration of the Detention Centre tried to refuse the possibility of farewell bidding.

As if for the lack of convoy. It was court decision that made they take Zmitser to Slutsk, to his mother.
That very day a car left the detention centre and headed for Slutsk. We were driving alongside with it and knew that Zmitser was there. I still have the telephone number of the convoy guard whom I explained how to get to the place.
I know there are some pictures concerning it on the net, but I believe it's unethical to take pictures at such moments...
It was the only (in the last 19 months) moment when we contacted not through mail.
— Let's get back to your arrest.
— I won't go into details on what happened in the evening of December 19th on the Independence Square. I was very lucky then (if one can talk about luck under such circumstances) to escape the OMON's batons and police vans. Moreover, I managed to get to the apartment that Zmitser had rented before the election and packed a parcel with his warm clothes to take to the Temporary Detention Centre the next morning.
I got home about three o'clock in the morning. I started to write a letter to Zmitser. As I was writing the third page, the doorbell rang, and I realized they had come for me. And so it was.
I first thought I wouldn't open the door, but they kept ringing the doorbell, awakened my father. Then I decided to open — otherwise they would have broken the door open. I thought, they would take me and Dad will have to stay overnight with the broken door...
I asked for 10 minutes to change my clothes. They agreed. This proves that Hrodna security officers aren't as impudent as the ones in Minsk.
I started packing my things. Dad was very worried. I calmed him down and asked to pack some food, as I thought I'd get a several day arrest, and food parcels would be forbidden. He went to the kitchen, put some meat chops into my parcel. He also wanted to put some bread, but I stopped him: there's enough bread in prison.
By the way, they stole the chops in KGB, so, when the investigator told me about "security officers" honour" I mentioned those chops... it's hard to believe, isn't it? They steal in the "coolest" prison of the country...
The route we took apparently revealed that they had orders to arrest other members of the Young Front, too.

Frankly speaking, I thought I'd be taken to Akrestsin street Detention Centre, but it appeared to be the "Americanka". I accepted the news calmly. Zmitser Fedaruk and Aleh Korban had been there, so I knew "we" had already gone through this.

We were walking along the endless corridors before we reached the investigators" rooms. A door was open and I saw sleepy Anatol Liabiedzka in one of the rooms. I was "glad" to see a familiar face and at the same time I was scared of the thought about how many of us were there. At that time I didn't know yet, how many...

Then there was a questioning where I learned I'd get from five to fifteen days arrest. The investigator, almost asleep, his fist under his cheek. About four hours of waiting for the convoy, because they couldn't manage SUCH number of arrested. Absence of letters and any other information. The verdict.

— What do you need all this for? You could have participated in beauty contests instead of "Americanka"...

— I guess, it came with mother's milk. It was very early that I realized something was wrong in my country. In my opinion, every person must solve problems which concern them. I'm concerned about neglected political will of the Belarusians and their indifference to what surrounds them.

The way to the temple

During my work over this essay we happened to know that Zmitser Dashkevich's letters were being burnt in Hrodna prison. I don't know what the people in charge of such decisions are guided by. Maybe, they're really "saving energy". If so, they'd better try saving their conscience.

Some of you probably remember the movie "Repentance" by Tengiz Abuladze and the quotation about not all roads leading to the temple. To my mind, Nasta Palazhanka and Zmitser Dashkevich have chosen that very way that will finally bring them to the temple. No matter what suffering it might require.

Afterword

Two major events have happened in the life of the essay's heroes recently. On December 26th 2012 they got married and Nasta Palazhanka became Nasta Dashkevich. And on August 28th Zmitser was released. My heartiest congratulations! Thanks God! White-red-white love has won!



WORTHY ORDEAL

Prepared for publication on 07.01.13

Reference note: Iryna Halip was born on November 12, 1967 in Minsk. The correspondent of the Russian "Novaya Gazeta" in Belarus. Worked as a deputy editor at "Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta" and editor in chief at the weekly newspaper "Imia". Was repeatedly prosecuted for her professional activities. The wife of the candidate for presidency Andrey Sannikau. On December 19th 2010 on her way from the Independence Square she was detained together with her husband and placed into the KGB Investigative Isolator. At the end of December she was indicted according to art. 293 parts 1 and 2 (organizing and participating in mass riots).
While Iryna Halip and Andrey Sannikau were in KGB investigative isolator the authorities made an attempt to put their 3-year-old son Danik to an orphanage. On January 23rd 2011 the administration of the Partyzansky district in Minsk gave Iryna's mother Liutsyna Bialzatskaya a document recognizing her guidance over her grandson. On January 29th 2011 the measure of restraint for Iryna Halip was changed for house arrest. On April 4th the charges were redefined for art. 342 p.1 (organization of group action violating public order). On May 16th 2011 she was convicted to a 2-year suspended imprisonment.

Iryna Halip is a record-holder as far as all sorts of prizes are concerned. Not only in journalism. And every time she gets a prize, I feel happy for her, as this is the rare case when "the fighter for democratic values" coincides with talent and professionalism.

Lutsyjana Bialzatskaya's ordeal

When the guardianship over her grandson was established, Lutsyjana was made to open a bank account where insignificant sums of state money were deposited. When the guardianship was removed, Lutsyjana Bialzatskaya transferred the money for sick children's assistance.

"I was born in Warsaw on July 23rd 1936. In 1939, when Hitler attacked Poland and the Soviet Union "liberated" Western Belarus and Ukraine, my parents managed to cross the border and arrived at Belastok.

My father's name was Yury Bialzatski. He was a famous jazz musician. His name's in many polish encyclopedias. He finished the Higher Music School named after Chopin, and then the conservatory. He was a song-writer and owned a publishing house.

I didn't change my surname when I got married.

Our Warsaw house was in Towarna street, it was one of the first streets attacked by German bombs. I remember my mum carried me in her hands and she told me: "Close your little eyes!" She did it so that I couldn't see what was going on around us. All of our friends and relatives who decided to stay there died.

The first secretary of the Communist Party of Belarus Pantseliajmon Panamarenka was a great fan of jazz music. He ordered to form the State pop ensemble under the direction of Eddie Rosner, that became extremely popular later. Rosner was a real star.

My father was invited to play for the ensemble. They toured with concerts all around the Soviet Union. Then some of the musicians left to fight in Anders" army and the orchestra was "manned up" with Soviet musicians. In 1946 Eddie Rosner was arrested and labeled "the people's enemy" for his wish to move to Poland. My father was offered to return to Belarus, though there was an opportunity to stay in Moscow, too. He first worked in Babrujsk operetta theatre, and then in the Opera theatre in Minsk. He wrote much film music. You can hear it in almost all Belarusian post-war movies. Father also worked as a conductor. Then he was invited to head the Belarusian Radio and Television Pop Orchestra. Unfortunately, in 1963, at the age of 53, my father died. I finished secondary school No.2 in Minsk with a "gold" medal. It used to be an all-girls school. The Republican medical centre is located in that building nowadays.

I entered the Faculty of Philology, the department of the Russian language and literature. Graduated with a diploma with honors. All of my life I have worked at the Academy of Science publishing house. Its

name coincided with the name of the founder at first, and then the publishing house was renamed to "The Science and Technology".

Valodzia and I have known each other since university years. But we knew little about each other then, as he entered the Faculty of Journalism much later than I got into the University. Working experience was a mandatory requirement for future journalists.

We had the same faculty at that time, just different specializations. We met at lectures. By the way, Ryhor Baradulin, Hena Buraukin, Tolia Sachanka, kastus Tsvirka and many others studied there with us. And Nil Hilevich was a young graduate student then. A fantastic faculty!

There were lots of girls at the Faculty of Philology, of course. Many of them got married with the people who are considered the elite of Belarusian literature nowadays. The guys from the Faculty of Journalism would come to our diploma thesis defense.

One of my friends is the wife of the composer Siarhey Kartes. It was at his work's premiere that we started dating with Mr. Halip.

In my job I've made it from an ordinary proofreader to the head of department. I've met practically all scientific elite of Belarus at work.

It was very hard at the beginning. I'm a Russian language specialist by education, but I had to deal with Belarusian a lot. It's O.K. I got used to it. My first proofread book was a book of critics by Ales Adamovich "The Belarusian Novel". I talked to the author several times. We call it "to eliminate questions" at publishing houses... I even have this book where Ales Adamovich wrote to me: "To the person, on whom 80% of the author's literacy depends".

On December 19th 2010 I stayed at home with my grandson. All the others (Valodzia, Andrey and Iryna) went to the October Square. Danik was waiting for his parents" return and couldn't understand why they were not coming so long. We told him nonsense about a long-term business trip... The boy was only three and a half years old then... Unfortunately, it didn't stop the people who detained him when he came to the kindergarten celebration. Only people with no conscience at all can do it...

Iryna was considered a detainee. Only three days later the investigator called to tell us her status was changed for that of an arrested. So, it was finally allowed to bring her some necessary things, like a toothbrush.

It was also said about the report to the Guidance service about the child having been left alone, without the adults. I tried to tell him that the child has grandparents, but the investigator refused to listen to me.

In two days, that kindergarten celebration took place. And they wouldn't let Danik and his nanny leave. They required that relatives arrive. I almost fainted on my way to the kindergarten then.
My grandson was alone in a playroom. He was sitting at a small table, driving a toy-car on it. I was asked to come to the kindergarten headmaster's office. There were the district guidance specialist and — what impressed me most of all — the orphanage's director there. So, everything had already been prepared…
It appeared that after my conversation with the investigator on Thursday night, the KGB documents arrived on Friday morning. So, I was told that I either filled in the guidance application form or (if it's impossible) the state would take care of my grandson… They allowed only one month to get all the necessary documents.
I prepared all the documents (neuropsychiatric, dermatovenerologic, drug treatment centres test certificates). They even took my blood test for AIDS diagnostics. Along with Danik's. And no one paid attention to his age…
The documents were ready on time, but the final decision was taken only in two weeks. Looks like somebody was searching for something to find fault with…
Even when Iryna was released, the guardianship was not removed. It occurred no sooner than July 2011, after the revocation of the sentence.

The film script by Uladzimir Halip

The father of Iryna Halip is well-known not only as an outstanding contemporary film director. Uladzimir Halip is also a CITIZEN. The great one.
My birthplace is the village Dvor Plina in Ushachy district of Vitsebsk region. I was born on October 7, 1939. If you go from Vasil Bykau's birthplace to the one of Ryhor Baradulin, mine is halfway. It used to be part of Polatsk region, so we have always considered ourselves "polatsk" but not "vitsebsk" people. Our dialect is slightly different from theirs.
My father Trafim Ivanavich was a military pilot, and his father Ivan Adamavich was a royal officer, which almost cost him life. Apparently, security officers didn't kill him because he resigned much earlier than the October revolution took place…
My father studied at Horky Agricultural Academy, but when he noticed the threats from punitive institutions (they kept tabs on everyone), he

left from his 4th year of studies to become a pilot, which was rather a popular profession then.
He finished a flying school after Kachyn. But before the war NKUS (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) got interested in his personality once again. Just in case he was discharged from the army and sent to Svir (Hrodna region) to work as an agronomist.
I've got some childhood memories from our life there. I remember the huge lake on the bank of which we lived in a rented bathhouse. I know our hostess was later "dispossessed" and sent to Siberia.
When the war started, it was suddenly "recalled" that father was a pilot, and he was drafted into the army. He went to war at once, I mean, on June 22nd 1941. He went through that war up to the victory. He was shot down three times, got badly injured — spent half a year in a hospital in Kazan.
After the victory over Germany, when the war seemed to be finished, their regiment was moved to the Far East to fight with Japan.
In 1946 it was once again recalled that father is of "a bad origin". He was probably looked upon as a "son of a White Guard officer" by those morons with three years of education. And none of them had wit enough to understand that granddad resigned from the army 15 years before the White Guard was formed...
From a military man father was made an agronomist again.
He was constantly persecuted, had to move houses very often. He died in Volgograd region.
My granddad on the mother's side was also wealthy, he had a farm. A few minutes before the arrest he had a heart attack and NKUS officers were considering for some time if they should take the dead man to the police station or not...
I happened to finish school in Kutaisi, another "hiding spot" for my parents. I had studied for two years in Kutaisi secondary school. We had nice teachers there. Everything was different there.
Whatever they say, even in soviet times Georgia has never been as toughly tormented as Belarus. In tsar's times there was a grammar school in our building, and when Bolsheviks came to power there was practically no change. None of our former teachers were fired or repressed.
They had 11 years of study in Georgia. I didn't want to be a sponger in my parent's family, so after the 9th form I went to study in Batumi

Nautical School. Following wise advice I enrolled for the marine engineering and no t navigating department in order to have a coastal profession too.

When the practical classes started, the navigators went on board of ships and we went to metalwork workshops. And I realized that metal was not "my cup of tea". I asked to be transferred but the master refused. So, I had to "bite the bullet" and wait for the graduation. After the graduation I went to Odessa High nautical school. But my eyesight has already started to deteriorate and I didn't pass the medical examination.

I came to my granny to Dvor Plina and from there headed for the Belarusian State University, the Faculty of Journalism. Those were still Khrushchou's times, so for many specializations you needed a 2-year working experience to be enrolled to University. I earned that experience in my native collective farm and tried to enter the university again. There were no troubles this time.

As undergraduate students we had half a year of practical studies. I initially wanted to join the Southern Fleet and work for "Na Strazhe Zapoliarya". It didn't work. I've only lost time. Most newspapers already had their trainees, and only "Chyrvonaya Zmena" accepted me. They decided agricultural department would be good for improving my "re-education" (as I looked like a mod). The only worker was on maternity leave, the head of department — an ulcer patient in hospital. To cut the long story short, the "trainee" turned into the boss.

There was "the corn craze" in the country at that time. We needed a whole page on the topic in our newspaper daily, and two pages — once a week. The people who know what I'm talking about can prove it's rather difficult. I occasionally got earache from the telephone receiver. But I managed it. I've even been to some trips on business.

In a month i joined the staff of the newspaper and had to combine work and studies. And very soon (unfortunately) I became the leading truant. But I had no placement. And one year after I graduated from university I became the head of information department.

In spite of the fact that there was a military department at university (Ryhor Baradulin almost dropped out of the university because of it) the recruitment office sent me to serve in Pechy, known for its awful reputation. Later, I was promoted to the rank of lieutenant and sent as a platoon commander to Uruchcha in Minsk.

On return to Minsk I became went to post-graduate studies at the Institute of Art History. In 1975 I defended my thesis, and I was invited to the newspaper "The Soviet Culture" as a correspondent in Belarus.
Then it seemed to Masherau (someone wrote an accusation letter) that there appear only critical materials on Belarusian issues in the newspaper. We figured out during our conversation that it was not so. Masherau (taking into account that Belarus was my Motherland) asked me to write a film script about the famous breakthrough of the German besiege and offered me the post of an instructor at the Culture department of CC CPB (Central committee of the Communist Party of Belarus). It was said so frankly then, that I couldn't refuse.
I wrote the film script "the Flame" ("Polymia"), but it was forgotten, I guess. As well as I was. All my attempts to escape "the party trap" were vain, but eventually I resigned. It all happened secretly and ungraciously.
I "was punished" for giving a permission to show the author's version (before it was censured) of Siarhey Paradzhanau's movie "The Color of Pomegranates". I learnt about my resignation only two weeks later, when I came to get my salary… it was then that I heard about my new working place — State Cinema BSSR. From there I soon moved to "Belarusfilm", where I worked as an editor in chief of the script studio. The 30-year anniversary of victory was approaching, and so we remembered about "The Flame". A famous Belarusian film director (unfortunately deceased by now) Vital Chatsverykou made the movie.
The 5th Congress of the Union of USSR Cinematographers took place in 1987. Under the influence of "perestroika" they have already gained creative self-rule. Their structure wasn't subordinated to the Party structures any longer. All the creative studios should have an artistic director, not state officials, to rule them.
That was how I became the head of the documentary studio "Letapis" ("The Chronicle"). We were good workers, got lots of international prizes, managed to realize many interesting projects. I saw the future Head of State at some movie shooting in the Supreme Soviet of the 12th convocation. He seemed a person far from normal standards. Quite the contrary.
After he became president we were almost at once advised to change the name of the program "Revival". The program was dedicated to powerful figures of our history and contemporary life (such as Usiaslau

Charadziej and Vasil Bykau). It was explained that a program with such a name couldn't be transmitted on TV... we didn't change anything. Then I was advised to make a film about Lukashenka. As they didn't think much of our studio "up there"...

Again, we did nothing about it.

They tried to find fault with "Letapis" several times. They even arranged an unexpected financial verification. No use.

The studio was eventually eliminated by a trivial order, and I resigned at once. It was back in 1996.

The smile of Iryna Halip

When Iryna was convoyed along the KGB Investigative Isolator corridors, she laughed aloud. Not only for everyone to know that they can never break her will. The main reason was the hypothetical possibility that her husband Andrey Sannikau will hear her laughing and it will be a sort of support for him.

I'm a Minsk citizen. Almost all of my life I've lived near Gorky Park, so in some sense it's my homeland. As a "normal Soviet child", I went to secondary school No. 10 which is situated in Braniavy lane, because at that time I lived not far from there at my granny's Hitel (mother's mother — **the author's note**).

By the way, her house was linked by an arch with "a military school" which was a KGB school in reality. I remember some officers with signalers" emblems asked the way to the School of Communication. And my granny said there was nothing of the kind near there, but what they were looking for was just around the corner...

Besides the neighborhood with "the fighters of invisible front", her house was peculiar for another reason. There was a shop called "Gifts of Nature". Its service entrance was in our yard and there always was the old "Pobeda" car in front of it. The car belonged to the director Bokun. His son Valodzia Bokun became a film director and made really good movies. My granny was a friend to all shop assistants of the shop "Gifts of nature" and we occasionally received some "gifts" thanks to that friendship...

I remember this yard very well . I remember there was a long bench there, and all the residents of the house would gather on that bench in the evening. And every year on Victory Day people would bring out their tables, make one common table and celebrate all together. It's hard to imagine anything of the kind nowadays. I've recently been to

that yard. Elderly women, sitting on the bench, remembered me , and Huta Yakauleuna Bialzatskaya, and my mum. It turned out, they still celebrate Victory Day all together, the whole yard… It's probably the only house in Minsk where such a beautiful tradition lives on… It's a pity…

In the first form at school I was diagnosed with scoliosis. And in two years I had to go to a specialized school. It was such a "school of survival" after which one shouldn't be afraid neither of the army service, nor the KGB prison.

When I got to that school, I was younger than 9 years old. I mean, as a little child I found myself in a situation where I had to survive. We had a tough timetable, with activities closely following each other and no personal space at all.

As far as household problems are concerned, I don't even want to talk about them. For example, I we had to sleep on a solid board in a special plaster mold, which allowed no movement. Imagine being such a tramp for five years.

Moreover, we were kids, taken from our families, and we didn't realize it was done "for our sake". We were a real pack of wolves. Everyone fights to win their spot, everyone wants to be the leader. In a pack like that someone is always mocked at, beaten or boycotted. Ruthless children's community. When ordinary kids come from school their parents and grandparents pity and caress them, but here the whole week you think of how to survive and behave so that no one could guess they were stronger than you are.

Despite the fact that I had friends in the school, that environment was still awfully ruthless. Especially taking into account that we were constantly convinced of our own inferiority and defectiveness… I was one of the luckiest, actually… I remember there was a girl who came at the same time as I did. We both were in the 3rd form. By the end of the 7th form she was almost hunchbacked… And nothing could be done about it… The school developed my adaptability to any conditions, the ability to get used to dwelling in any place with any people. Even with KGB officers, who, as you know, lived in my house up till the court trial.

Though Danka helped much more. I didn't want him to witness our "being at war"…

I came back to an ordinary school (No.54) in the 8th form. I was very nervous. What if somebody thinks that the specialized school was a

neurological one, or something... I finished the school with gold medal and entered the Faculty of Journalism of the BSU. My parents wanted me to become a physicist, but I've chosen journalism and never regretted it.

It's like when you come to a shop, try a thing on and realize it's YOURS.

The parents were shocked, but they're used to everything.

I entered the university in 1984, and in 1985 "perestroika" with its free-thinking started. So, I was lucky again.

After the university studies I was sent to "Chyrvonaya Zmena" newspaper, just like my dad had been sent there before. People at once started talking about profitable connections. Such labels appeared repeatedly, and I stopped paying attention to them.

Then there was the "Parus" magazine, and even "Sovetskaya Belorussiya" (or, to be precise, its addition named "Paniadzielak"). It was right before the new authority was established. Ihar Asinski was its editor in chief and we were going to become a joint-stock partnership. But it became a presidential newspaper.

Soon "the white spots" appeared instead of Antonchyk's report. Yakubovicha was appointed instead of Yasinski, and I resigned at once.

It was a good luck, that right at that time (in 1995) Petsia Martsau opened the newspaper "Imia" ("Name"), and I started working there. And when it was closed, I worked for the "Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta" ("Belarusian Business Newspaper") and wrote for the invented by Sveta Kalinkina "Dlia suzhebnogo polzovaniya" ("For official use only"). Then almost accidentally in 2003 I got to the "Novaya Gazeta".

I got acquainted with Andrey Sannikau during the presentation of "Charter-97". A romance started, and since 2002 (more than 10 years now!) we've been living together.

There was no wedding. We registered the marriage so that Andrey wouldn't have to officially adopt his own son... Foolish bureaucratic system... We registered the marriage on May 8th 2007. I remember Andrey attached a small rubber duckling (you can often see them in children's bathtubs) to his old green Opel so that I had an impression of a wedding procession. "This is going to be the wedding limousine", — he said.

On May 15th 2007 (into our legally married family) Danka was born.

People often ask me, what for I need everything that happened

afterwards. My answer is: in order to live with clear conscience and know that I haven't betrayed anyone and I am not doing anything bad. As Solzhenitsyn put it, in order not to live in lies.

P.S. After many hours of talking to these people it's hard to get rid of the desire to say slogans. I'd only add that it's ever so pleasant to meet people who are able to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others!!!

THE LAND OF SANNIKAU



Ready for publication on 07.12.2012

Reference Note: Andrey Sannikau was born on the 8th of March 1954. In 1971 he finished the secondary school No.42 in Minsk. In 1977, he graduated from Minsk State Institute of Foreign Languages. In 1989 he graduated from the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR in Moscow. He worked at the Society of Friendship with Foreign Countries, in the UN Secretariat in New York. He was also a counselor at the Mission of the Republic of Belarus in Switzerland. In 1995 — 1996 he worked as a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus. He resigned the post in November 1996 to mark his protest against the unconstitutional referendum. In November 1997, he became the founder and international coordinator of the civil initiative "Charter'97". In 2008, he initialized the civil campaign "European Belarus". A. Sannikau was constantly persecuted and repeatedly arrested and beaten up for his political activity, when in Belarus.
He ran for presidency in 2010. After the crackdown on the October Square, he was severely beaten by SWAT-fighters and detained on his way to hospital together with his wife Iryna Halip. He was kept in the KGB jail and accused on charges of art. 293 part 1 and 2 (organization of mass riots and participation in mass riots).
On May 14, 2011, he was sentenced to a 5 years" imprisonment in a strict regime colony.
He was released on April 14, 2012 according to the presidential decree of pardon.
In October A. Sannikau was granted political asylum in Great Britain.

One can try to imagine how many times the cliché from the title of this essay has been used by other journalists… I've also decided to

use it because I see some synonymous connection between the words "land" and "life". And it's very simple to explain: whatever LAND people choose, their LIFE depends on them only…

A real conversation

I met Andrey Sannikau the day before the announcement of presidential election date. In a few days the interview was printed in "Narodnaya Volia". We all know quite well what happened later, so there's no use telling it again. But I find it quite logical to recall some parts of that conversation.

— As far as I know, you worked for this authority for a year and a half. So, have you supported Lukashenka?

— No, never.

— Who did you vote for in 1994?

— For Pazniak. I worked in Switzerland at that time. Some time after Lukashenka was elected Uladzimir Sianko, then appointed the Minister, invited me. So, I joined in his work. During our first conversation, when he announced the offer, I was reluctant to accept. We met later again. I told him I was interested in creating a professional Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So, our interests coincided. I mean, we both wanted to continue working on the preservation of statehood and independence of Belarus.

— How did you actually become a diplomat?

— I was born in Minsk. Finished the famous school No.42 — the one where many famous people studied. I'm sure many of them would respond to the number 42. My father had finished it before me, my mother worked there. Then I entered the Institute of Foreign Languages.

I've never been particularly determined to become a diplomat. During my studies and after them, I worked as an interpreter in Pakistan and Egypt. Then there was my first step in this direction. I enrolled at the UN translating Courses (there were such courses in Moscow in the Soviet times). When the course finished, I got to the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs system and from 1981 till 1987 I worked for the UN organization, in the service for Russian translations, to be precise. Besides Russian and Belarusian I know English, French and Polish . Then, quite unexpectedly, I was offered advised to study at the Diplomatic Academy.

I didn't agree at once. They had serious exams there. Then two years of study. I consider it a second education, as the teachers were very qualified and respectable — ambassadors, politicians, scientists. I had a lot of offers afterwards. I was even invited to work for the Soviet Ministry

of Foreign Affairs. But I've always wanted to return to Belarus. I was lucky to study in Moscow in 1987 — 1989. It was the culmination of "perestroika". I came back to Belarus and had the opportunity to work for the independence of our country, not for a part of the Soviet Union. The recollections of those times are particularly pleasant. It was then that I realized I was a Belarusian, not an abstract soviet citizen.

It's hard to explain, how this happened. I didn't speak Belarusian, but I've always considered myself a Belarusian. Wherever I was. Such a question has never risen here, of course. But then I made friends in Russian and Ukraine. By the way, I've always felt more at ease with the Ukrainians, as they were never ashamed of their nationality. Neither was I. I always wonder when applying for a visa people state "USSR" as their former citizenship. I've always written "Belarus" there, as I know for sure that the word "passport" was written in Belarusian, not in Russian on my ID. It was written in a soviet passport, but it WAS after all.

I've always wanted to be a Belarusian, though I was frequently offered to move to Moscow. Many of people I knew did so. It's common knowledge, there are many such people these days, too. Including journalists. It's considered that one has better opportunities for self-realization there.

I've never had such desires. My feeling of home has always won.

— How great was your granddad's influence?

— Though we spoke Russian in my family, I heard the Belarusian language all the time. For instance, I remember well, my granddad worked several times with Makayonak as others as a film director, an actor, and later a teacher at the Theatre and Arts Institute. It's clear, I went to the theatre and watched plays in Belarusian. On the other hand, my mother has just recently stopped teaching Russian to foreign students. One has to agree, the combination is rather interesting.

Unfortunately, I haven't studied Belarusian at school, but it's always been in my life.

— While working in New York you were the head of the Russian Literature Club and arranged meetings with some famous "Soviet Belarusians".

— Yes, we met with Ryhor Baradulin, other writers. I also organized screenings of movies by Turau, Ptashuk, Dabraliubau.

I guess many of the readers have seen a commemorative plaque on one of the buildings of the main avenue. It was established there to honor

Kanstantsin Sannikau. In that house a famous Belarusian film director, the People's Artist of the BSSR, one of the founders of Yanka Kupala State Academic Theatre lived. He was the essay hero's granddad.

Virtual Conversation

I've heard people talking about Andrey Sannikau's departure to Great Britain with certain malevolence. That it's more convenient to fight "the bloody regime" in comfortable conditions. I won't argue about it.

Unfortunately, people have got used to cynical approach in the last 18 years. And another observation: it's usually the people "fighting" in their kitchens only, who label others willingly...

— What have you noticed (as far as politics is concerned) when you were released?

— All that was going on in politics could be seen from prison, too. Analytical skills improve when you're behind the bars. There's the lack of information. Newspapers don't get there. The letters are intercepted. They punish the prisoners even for an attempt of communication. So, you have to draw conclusions about the political situation judging by small pieces of information from casual conversations (including the ones with jailers). You also get a peculiar "prisoner's feeling", for politics too. So, after Russia obeyed Lukashenka again in August 2011 and allocated huge funds for the regime's preservation, it was clear that the situation in Belarus will be getting worse. Another chance lost. It was clear that the regime was awfully scared by what had happened during the presidential elections, and would destroy its opponents and control the opposition.

— Have you ever felt you were suffering for nothing?

— No. but it sure was a shame that I was imprisoned when a lot could have been achieved by the way of negotiation, or even through some confrontation, but without violence.

— What was the first thing you did when released?

— Returned to the path of normal life. Washed myself thoroughly, so that I didn't touch my son with the prison smells and clothes, put on my home clothes and waited for him to wake up.

— How did your "life after the prison bars" go?

— The main thing about being released is your return to your dearest and nearest. We were kept apart for so long. It was even difficult to start talking to each other in a normal way. I "talked" to them constantly

when behind the bars. And those thinking conversations have created an illusion that we've discussed many things in reality.

All my friends are still friends and there're many more friends I didn't know before the imprisonment. All who helped my family, who supported my family and me, have become friends. Unfortunately, I didn't manage to meet everyone and thank them all. Some of my friends had to move abroad. When I was released, I didn't know yet that I'd have to do the same. I tried to sound calm and even when evaluating the situation and possible ways out of this dead end, but the regime reacted aggressively. I realized, I personally wouldn't get a chance not only to work, but to live in peace. And the feeling of responsibility before the people who believed our team increased after my release from behind the bars. All this became the reasons of my departure. I believe, a temporary one.

— What's the essence of life abroad?

— I don't know what the essence of living abroad is. I'm not the person to answer such questions. I was forced to leave temporarily, and while here, I still deal with Belarusian issues, not foreign ones.

— Some time has already passed since "the presidential arrests". Any thoughts on the topic?

— The arrests of candidates for presidency on December 19^{th} -20^{th} are, as far as I can see, the evidence of this regime's fear of inevitable change. I thought so when being arrested, and I still think so today.

— What (from the point of view of the present day) should have been done in a different way?

— A lot could have been done differently, but the circumstances were tough: limited time, limited (very much) funds and enormous tasks. To my mind, we've made the utmost from the situation, even through self-sacrifice.

— Why continue fighting? Aren't you afraid?

— I avoid pathos in my life. It's a principle. I just continue doing what I have done before, guided by my own beliefs, principles and understanding of the situation.

As you know, history has never heard of the subjunctive mood. So, we won't make guesses about what could have happened should Andrey Sannikau have won the elections on December 19^{th} 2010. But he is definitely not going to hide in "political shadow". Which means, we will have other opportunities to mention "the Land of Sannikau"...



NEW PROFILES

SIARHIEJ ANTONCHYK



Prepared for publication on 30.08.2013

While working on Siarhiej Antonchyk's profile, I was amazed by two things. One was that this common blue-collar worker had a highly philosophical attitude to life. The other was that he did not strike me as a mighty hero from a fairy tale. However, it was Siarhiej Antonchyk who had made Alexander Lukashenka weep hysterically, even though Lukashenka is now perceived as a powerful and steadfast man. If I remember right, so far this has been the only episode of its kind in the recent history of Belarus.

Moreover, Siarhiej Antonchyk has all the reasons to consider himself happy, as he has witnessed a crucial event in his life, namely the proclamation of Belarusian state sovereignty. He was directly engaged in this process.

The Involvement Gene

It may sound funny, but Siarhiej Antonchyk was actually born on April Fools" Day, on 1 April 1956 in Pleščhanicy, Lahojsk district, which has a reputation for being "the mushroom capital" of Belarus.

The little town had two secondary schools and a boarding school, but when Siarhiej was old enough to go to school, his parents chose the school which was closest to where the family lived. To be more precise, in such small towns nobody actually has any choice of schools to educate their children, who go to the school that they are assigned. This was all the more so in the Soviet epoch.

The Antonchyk family was far from rich, to put it mildly. School teachers tended to favour children whose parents were better-off than others, that is, the local office holders. As for Siarhiej's parents, his father

Anton was a cabinetmaker and a former prisoner, he came from Shack, a settlement not far from Rudziensk, and his mother Nadzieja, who was born in Haraviec, a village in the vicinity of Pleščhanicy, worked at the local hospital. Some fifteen or twenty years before she retired she was a nurse's aide; until then she had worked as a chatelaine, administrative manager and even a nurse during surgical operations, all in one; this was a typical situation after World War II. In other words, the Antonchyk family was not highly placed at all.

There were four children in the family, so Siarhiej had three siblings: the eldest brother Alexander was born in 1951, sister Lubou was born in 1954 and the youngest brother Źmicier was born in 1960.

Siarhiej did well at school. Moreover, until he was fifteen and in the eighth form, he had been receiving certificates of merit for his excellent performance. However, as a teenager, led by the pursuit of justice, as is often the case at this vulnerable age, Siarhiej had some conflicts with teachers.

Nowadays it would not be a problem, but the morals of the young, who were supposed to "build communism", were under close scrutiny at the time. Schoolchildren would surreptitiously go to the dances, as discotheques were called, where teachers would invariably catch them.

When a daughter of his mother's co-worker, who also came from a poor family, got caught, the teacher castigated her in public, virtually labelling the girl a prostitute. She was deeply insulted. Siarhiej was so indignant that he found and read the works of the well-known Soviet humanistic pedagogue Sukhomlinsky, to quote them later in class.

This caused a major scandal, as Soviet teachers were totally unaccustomed to such behaviour. Siarhiej's mother was even told off at the headmaster's office. Naturally, he finished school not as a top student.

The young man wanted to continue his studies, but he couldn't because of the family's poor financial situation. Moreover, his conscience told him that he would have to earn money first and only then apply to university.

Siarhiej's mother helped him get a job at a timber procurement company. It was there that the young man had his first experience of work.

It was a true school of hard knocks, as the team of woodcutters almost entirely consisted of men who had done time for all sorts of offences.

But the money was very good. While Siarhiej's mother was paid 90 roubles a month, he earned 240 roubles. Yet, he had to work from early morning till late at night and the working conditions were pretty tough.

When Siarhiej just started, his co-workers thought he had been given the job by law enforcement officials as part of a placement programme for juvenile delinquents, because he had a strong physique. They treated him accordingly, until they realised that he was an ordinary person without any criminal record. It came as a big surprise for the others in the team that Siarhiej did not smoke or drink or use bad language. His co-workers may have had a lot of faults, but they were very sincere. Moreover, it was then that Siarhiej Antonchyk began to realise that those people who had been in trouble could tell the difference between good and evil.

There were people of all types among them. They worked when they wanted to and they stopped working whenever they felt like. No boss could make them bend to his will. Those people had a special sense of dignity about them.

Siarhiej remembers a highly telling episode. He always had to help his family because his father was disabled. When he had his leg amputated because of gangrene, the young man had to take on all household chores like cutting and chopping wood to keep the house warm.

One day Siarhiej couldn't come to work, and his co-workers traded the wood he had prepared for vodka. When the young man found it out tears welled up in his eyes. The other men in the team noticed that but did not say a word.

The next day the tree feller brought him a cartful of prime quality birch logs. "It's for you, lad", said the co-workers. "Never lose self-control.'

Adult life

Siarhiej Antonchyk worked for the timber procurement company until he was called up. He did his military service in the strategic missile troops. After training in the Ukrainian town of Kotovs'k, he was in charge of a squad and fuelled silo-based missiles. It was quite difficult and highly dangerous.

Unimaginable as it may seem, Siarhiej Antonchyk was eager to become a military man when he was a child and dreamt of going to study at the Suvorov Junior Officers" School in Minsk. The headmaster prepared all

the necessary papers for Siarhiej and another student called Andrejeu and sent them to the school. Andrejeu, who had slightly worse grades, was accepted but Antonchyk was not.

Siarhiej did not know the reason at the time, but now it is not too difficult to guess. The headmaster had fought in World War II. He and Siarhiej's father had once had a bottle of vodka and started an open conversation in low voices... The son of the former "people's enemy" could by no means be a Soviet military officer...

After he had done his military service Siarhiej once again worked for the timber procurement company for a while. He met a very beautiful young girl called Tamara at the time. She had been assigned to work for two years at the local community centre in Pleščhanicy after she graduated from choreography school.

It is interesting how they first met. Like many other people, Siarhiej was far less than enthusiastic about the official Soviet popular songs. He preferred Uriah Heep, Pink Floyd and Deep Purple. It was the latter that helped him meet Tamara.

She was playing one of their hits as Siarhiej passed by. He heard the piano and asked, "Do you listen to this kind of music?" and even gave the title of the song. Tamara said later it had been amazing for a girl from Minsk to hear that in a rural backwater from a young man dressed in peasant clothes.

In 1976, a year later, they got married. The husband was twenty-one then and the wife was only nineteen. They have been married for thirty seven years already.

Siarhiej moved to Minsk, the city that his wife came from. He found a job at one of the big plants which specialised in radio engineering.

In 1978 Siarhiej Antonchyk and his wife had a son called Siarhiej and a year later they had twins called Alexander and Julija.

Of course, Siarhiej Antonchyk had to give up the idea of getting a degree.

An Upsurge in Political and Workers" Movement

The Maskouski district branch of the Belarusian People's Front (BPF)[4] had the biggest number of members. The BPF staged the biggest mass

[4] The first national democratic movement that emerged in Belarus during Gorbachev's *perestroika.* Its main concern was the revival of the Belarusian language and culture and the establishment of democracy in Belarus. Later the Belarusian People's Front evolved into a political party. Its first leader was Zianon Paźniak, a highly charismatic and controversial figure in Belarusian politics.

protests in Paudniovy Zachad area of Minsk, where Siarhiej Antonchyk lived. This, of course, worried the regime, and the BPF activist found himself under close surveillance by secret services.

An acquaintance once told me that she and her colleagues at the local telephone switchboard knew what foodstuffs that were in short supply were going to be delivered to Paudniovy Zachad thanks to none other than Siarhiej Antonchyk. The agents who tapped him liked good food, too, so they also tapped the meat packer and local supermarkets.

At the 1989 elections of people's deputies of the USSR, as members of parliament were called in the Soviet Union, the BPF endorsed all democratically-minded candidates. Among them was Stanislau Shuškievich. Siarhiej Antonchyk is convinced that the support from the BPF was one of the factors that ensured Stanislau Shuškievich's victory.

In 1990 Siarhiej Antonchyk stood for parliament in the Jasieninskaja constituency at the elections to the Supreme Soviet of Belarus. He was faced with a tough resistance from the communist officials, but neither this nor the fierce competition with ten other candidates prevented him from winning in the first round.

At the same time Siarhiej Antonchyk's colleagues at the plant nominated him to the city council. He was elected and became one of half a dozen public figures who were both members of parliament and local councils.

In 1990 Siarhiej Antonchyk made his debut in the media when the enormously popular Moscow-based paper *Argumenty i Fakty* published an extensive interview with him under a telling title *Privileges, again*...

It was only logical that as a member of parliament he worked for the Commission on Privileges and Labour, then chaired by Ivan Hierasiuk.

The upsurge in political activities in the late 1980s was accompanied by the emergence of an independent workers" movement in Belarus. First strikes at plants were staged and a new organisation called the Workers" Union came into being.

Wherever like minds of Siarhiej Antonchyk worked, workers" committees sprang up. The process was probably facilitated by perestroika, because at Gorbachev's order all plants established "staff councils".

Siarhiej Antonchyk was elected the chairperson of Minsk Workers" Union.

The Memory of a Lifetime

Siarhiej Antonchyk:

"It did not matter much, basically, which parliamentary commission you belonged to, as long as you were a member of the BPF faction with its strict discipline. It was at the BPF faction meetings that we drafted all the pieces of legislation, including the Declaration of State Sovereignty.

It is important to stress the role played by Zianon Pazniak. I will keep saying all my life that we all grew as politicians by and large thanks to him. All the time he taught us lessons of true political and parliamentary work, and I would like to see only the truth about that time remembered in history.

At first the BPF faction consisted of sixteen members of parliament, then seventeen and finally twenty seven. In a sense, this small group represented a future of Belarus, delegated to us by the voters.

... On the first morning of the coup[5] I was woken up by a phone call from Valancin Holubieu, another member of the BPF faction who lived nearby. He told me about the state coup. I called at once the BPF and Workers" Union activists Hienadz Bykau and Hieorhi Muchin. We met a few hours later at the strike committee in Karol Street. Other BPF members came there, too.

We wrote leaflets and copied them, using offset duplicators that we had received from the Polish *Solidarność*. I handed out the first lot to passers-by in the city centre near the largest department store.

During the two days of the coup the strike committee looked like a beehive. Dozens of people came in, the work never stopped, not even for a minute.

Each of us knew that if the coup was successful we would go to prison or even be killed. In our country's history nationally conscious Belarusians have more than once suffered repression and even physical extermination.

When the parliament proclaimed Belarus an independent state, a vast crowd gathered in the square in front of the building. The people were hugging and kissing. Believe it or not, but I felt somehow sad at the moment. I had an impression that a war was going to break out... I couldn't help thinking that it was not yet an ultimate victory.

[5] The coup that took place on 19–21 August 1991, when a group of conservative hard-liners attempted to oust Gorbachev and put the USSR back on the old communist track.

Nowadays I often remember those feelings. The idea of revenge did not cross my mind then. Actually I attributed my state to overall fatigue, as I had been sleeping no more than two or three hours in the previous few days.

Unfortunately, Belarusian history is full of so many tragic events that it just cannot seem to develop slowly. If I was asked to present it schematically, I would mark 25 August 1991, when Belarus was proclaimed an independent state, with a white-red-white flag.[6] They should be placed along all the timeline of our history. What happened in 1991 was a continuation of 25 March 1918, when the Belarusian Democratic Republic was created. To use Nil Hilevich's[7] words, we are on the way to Belarus. In 1991 we made another step to it and we will make another one: our independence will become meaningful and the neighbouring empire will eventually break up.

Considering the circumstances, it would have been impossible to accomplish more at the time. The BPF faction did all it could. A crucial battle for Belarus is just beginning and there are no completed processes in history.'

Life Metamorphoses

On 6 July 1994, before the run-off in the presidential election, Narodnaja Hazieta published Siarhiej Antonchyk's article *Lukashenka vs. Kiebich: the Communist Show in Belarus Still Going on*. If you read it again now you will see that the author was absolutely right in his predictions.

Siarhiej Antonchyk prepared the well-known report to counter corruption in the upper echelons, and the rest is history. He paid dearly for it, as he had to go through a court trial and pay a heavy fine.

Few people remember nowadays that the BPF faction had insisted that Siarhiej Antonchyk should be included into the anticorruption commission headed by Lukashenka. He did not only consider Lukashenka's report superficial but also made his own alternative report in parliament.

Siarhiej Antonchyk continued to work in parliament until 1995, when its term expired. Later on, when the opposition forces began to claim

[6] The white-red-white flag is one of the Belarusian national symbols.

[7] Nil Hilevič is a prominent Belarusian poet and public figure.

that nothing could be done in this country, he developed a scheme that was called "workers" aid". The idea was to find money (not from donor foundations) to buy foodstuffs; groups of volunteers distributed such "packages" in every town. This was done for free and without any political implications.

This may have been the reason why opposition figures did not support the scheme. The regime, however, immediately sensed the danger. Siarhiej Antonchyk and his supporters found themselves under enormous pressure, which included detentions, trials and arrests. His adversaries even went so far as to openly threat him with murder. His wife was menaced that she would be poisoned and his daughter received a note, "For your father your child will be butchered.'

According to Siarhiej Antonchyk, special groups are set up to work with the most dangerous opponents in order to pressurise them into giving up or emigrating.

They did not succeed here with Antonchyk, but went on harming him in every way possible. When he tried to get a job, he was turned down everywhere, even in highly hazardous industries.

For two years he "illegally" worked as a porter for a private business, unloading boxes of beer, then built houses for another two years and then he read and advert for the job of a driver/porter and applied for it. Siarhiej Antonchyk has been working in this capacity for the last five years, as it is nearly impossible to survive on his small pension. By the way, it took the social security authorities five months to decide how much it should be.

LIAVON BARSHCHEUSKI



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I have to confess that I was literally shocked from the very start of my interview with Liavon Barshcheuski, because I had never before met a politician who openly admitted his mistakes and even began revealing them himself. It usually happens just the other way round.
To my mind, this is one of the reasons why we have been fighting against the dictatorship for nineteen years already, but still to no effect...

In an Adolescent's Eye

"I was lucky to be born near the Cathedral of St Sophia in Polacak, just about four hundred metres away. Every day on my way to school I passed the awe-inspiring edifice, which looked far from attractive then, to put it mildly. Part of the building was used as the premises of an archive and the other part was just decaying... There were pigeons flying under the roof of the invaluable piece of our historical heritage.
None of the people of older generations in my family had a university degree. My eldest brother Vadzim, who was born in 1950, and I were the first ones to get a higher education. I also have an elder brother called Mikalaj, who was born in 1953. He has worked for about forty years at Navapolacak Central Heating and Power Plant, even though technically he has reached the retirement age. By the way, my father also worked there for many years, first alone and then together with my brother.
My father came from a peasant family in the Drysa area, not far from Polacak. He must have had some creative potential, because the founder of the Kupala Theatre Flaryjan Ždanovich selected him for

his theatrical company while he was going around the countryside to recruit talents. However, my grandfather, Mikalaj by name, wouldn't let his son go, as he had to do the farming.

During World War I my grandfather was captured by the Germans and had to work for a landowner in Eastern Prussia for three years. He learned how to run a farm there, so when the Bolsheviks in Soviet Belarus switched to more liberal methods known as a "new economic policy" he managed to move from being a farm labourer to the class of "peasants of average income.'

However, when Stalin's "great turning point" arrived in 1929, my grandfather had enough common sense not to oppose the Bolshevik system but out of his own will gave everything he owned to a commune, which was later turned into a *kolkhoz*, a collective farm. As he put it, "Let them have their way". The family lost all its property but was able to avoid repression.

When my father, who was born in 1914, grew up, he and Granddad Mikalaj managed to hide in Vladivostok in the far east of Russia during the darkest years of "collectivisation" and Stalin's repression. They worked as freight handlers in the port there.

Some time later they returned home. My father went to study at Polacak Tractor College and obtained the qualifications of a farm machinery operator, which was a highly esteemed job at the time. After doing military service for three years he came back home, but he was in reserve for just one night. On 17 September 1939 the Red Army attacked Poland in order to merge Western Belarus and Ukraine into the Soviet Empire under the terms of the secret protocols of the Molotov — Ribbentrop pact. My father was not dispatched to Western Belarus but he served as an aide to military commissar in Zaslauje. His duties included censorship of all the local press. He said later that he had feared more there than at the frontline during World War II. Then he studied at the *Vystrel* School for Military Officers, fought in the war and got encircled, was checked by the counterintelligence department, led a platoon near Leningrad, participated in the storm of Königsberg and was transferred to Manchuria.

He left military service there in the rank of a major. His first wife had left him by then, so he remarried.

My mother's name was Alaksandra Sosnina. It was written in her passport that she was Russian, as the older generations of her family were Kuban

Cossacks. This probably explained her feisty spirit. There was never any grey area in her opinions: things looked either white or black.
After World War II my father was offered the job of deputy head of law enforcement for the Viciebsk region, but my mother did not let him take it, because she feared for him. After all, there were still a lot of guerrillas in the forests. He made a career in agriculture instead. It is an interesting coincidence that Mikalaj Dziemianciej,[8] who I opposed on the political field, had once been among my father's subordinates. As he did not have a university degree, the highest position my father held in his career was the general manager of the Polacak branch of *Autatraktarzbyt*, which supplied local collective farms with farming machinery. Following its reorganisation in the early 1960s my father quitted the job and became head of sales at the Central Heating and Power Plant in Navapolacak.
I earned my first "wages" in kind when I was still a child. In Khrushchev's time all our neighbours asked me to queue with them several times a day for bread, sugar and other foodstuffs, which were sold "per capita". In return they gave me either a portion of what I had bought or some sweets.
I also remember that I issued a paper when I was a child. We lived in the district of Polacak called Zapaloćcie, so my paper bore the title *Zapalocki Vieśnik* (The Messenger of Zapaloćcie). I used to attach its sole manuscript copy to the post of our sole bus stop. I wrote all local gossip there. In fact all people living in the district read and keenly discussed it. Sometimes they even complained to my parents.
When I was given my first camera, I began taking pictures for the paper. This went on for a few years. I must have had some intrinsic need to write and get through to people.
That manuscript paper can be considered my first experience of journalism.'

Profession

"... Throughout my school years I was always a top student. I still have no idea why the Viciebsk Regional Education Authority thought something was wrong with my paper in algebra at the final exams, but I did not finish school with honours, so I did not have any privileges when I applied to university.

[8] Mikałaj Dziemianciej was the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Belarus, i.e. the speaker of the parliament in 1990–1991.

My brother Vadzim advised me to apply to Moscow Institute of International Relations, but it required letters of recommendation from the Young Communists" League (YCL) and communist bodies, but I simply had no time to get them. Another option would have been the School of Scandinavian Languages at Leningrad University, but it only admitted students once in two years and I was not lucky here.

I was nearly old enough to be called up to do military service, so I decided against taking risks. I chose Minsk Institute of Foreign Languages. I passed all the admission exams with excellent grades and became a student of the German department that taught future teachers of German and English.

I could have chosen any field, as I was the winner of the contest in chemistry in Polacak, took the second place in the same contest in astronomy, etc. But I chose languages, first and foremost because my mother and Vadzim had always encouraged me to read. I was an avid reader and read a lot in German, for example, *The Master and Margarita* by Bulgakov, as the book was unavailable in Russian.

I tried my hand at translation when I was in the seventh form. Although my mother brought me up to speak Russian, my first translation was into Belarusian.

When I was at school I could read more or less fluently in three languages: German, English and Polish. Now I know over twenty five languages. This is not to say that I can speak all of them because you need to practise constantly to speak a language well.

When I began studying to be a philologist I decided I would become a true professional, which means knowing a lot of languages and being able to analyse texts. I have always found it funny that there were some "philologists" who in fact did not know any language properly but went on to make a brilliant academic career. Unfortunately, Belarusian history has had such examples.

I grew up among quite liberally-minded people. Every day we listened to *The Voice of America*, *Deutsche Welle*, Radio Liberty and other "enemy voices". Our wireless allowed for clear enough reception, except for Radio Liberty. It was on *The Voice of America* that I first heard *The Gulag Archipelago* by Solzhenitsyn.

Although my father was a member of the communist party, he was very critical of the communist bosses, who were "long in the tooth".

He advised me never to join the communist party. I fulfilled his will (my father died in 1983, having outlived my mother by six years).

But in my green years I was a member of the Young Communists" League and even headed its committee at school.

I sincerely believed at the time that young and energetic YCL members could make a difference in our country, but as I grew older I came to see things clearly, thank God.

I have made a lot of mistakes in my life, but fortunately escaped others. For example, I did not accept Piotr Krauchanka's[9] offer of a position with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, even though he did tempt me we brilliant career prospects. If I had, I would not have become a diplomat but would have lost my skills as a teacher.

Neither did I accept a proposal to serve as a propaganda officer in the Soviet Army, though my fellow students regarded that as good luck because it saved them from being assigned to some backwater country school upon graduation. All of them were happy to take the job because they were deployed in Eastern Germany. I must have been the only graduate to refuse the offer in many years.

As a top student I had some choice where to be assigned to work upon graduation. I was sent to some vocational training school in Babrujsk, but when I arrived there it turned out that the school had no vacancies, so they gladly let me go to my School No. 10 in Polacak, where I started off as a teacher.

At the end of my first year at the school I read a job advert for a teacher of German and English at Navapolacak Polytechnic Institute and decided to apply. But I still had two years to work at school and couldn't change jobs without permission from the Ministry of Education. Soon I was able to obtain the permission and after doing reservist training I learnt that I had the job.

Late in August 1981 I began working for the Department of Foreign Languages at the institute. Being the youngest, I was often dispatched with the students to pick up potatoes at collective farms and had to teach not only full-time students but also evening groups.

It proved a very helpful experience when I stood for parliament later, because all the students in such groups were no longer young but respectable and influential people who only needed a diploma of higher education.

[9] Piotr Kraŭčanka was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus in 1990–1994.

Of course, we did some German so that my students could get their credits, but we also talked a lot on topics "of human interest" and discussed what was going on in our country.
In 1984 I became a postgraduate student. Three years later I came back to Navapolacak and was offered the post of senior lecturer. I defended my thesis on textual linguistics in 1989. All the members of the board unanimously voted for giving me a PhD degree".

The Political Vector

"The second half of the 1980s caused a powerful information shock in many people. For example, when *the Litaratura i Mastactva* (Literature and Art) weekly published an article by Zianon Pazniak and Jauhien Shmyhalou under the title *Kurapaty: the Death Road*[10] I read it to all the ten groups of students where I taught English and German in class.
I was going to come to the *Dziady* (Forefathers" Eve) rally in 1988[11] but that Saturday I was appointed to teach at extra classes. Perhaps it was just a coincidence...
Navapolacak ranked then as the most polluted city in Belarus, and the petrochemical plant *Naftan* only partially accounted for it. The biggest polluter was the protein-vitamin concentrate plant. It was only logical that a powerful ecological movement emerged in Navapolacak. Its core consisted of engineering experts who needed somebody to compose letters, addresses and appeals to all sorts of institutions. The writers" group *Krynicy* took on this work. Among its members were Uladzimir Arlou, Siaržuk Sakalou-Vojuš, Vinceś Mudrou and myself.
Historians should know that the first mass protest in the recent history of Belarus took place not in Minsk but in Navapolacak. In 1987 a crowd of about ten thousand people got together in Budauniki Square. The chief communist party boss for the Viciebsk region Uladzimir Hryhorjeu had to come to Navapolacak to speak to the protesters, but he was immediately howled down and retreated in disgrace.
A few days later a meeting of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Party took place. It took a decision to improve

[10] The article revealed the Stalinist atrocities in Belarus in the 1930s. Kurapaty is a place in the vicinity of Minsk where hundreds of thousands of people were executed before World War II.
[11] The first mass rally staged by the BPF in Minsk on 30 October 1988 to commemorate the victims of Stalinist massacre. It was brutally dispersed by the riot police.

the standards of supplying Navapolacak with food, grant it certain preferences and deliver all running water filters Belarus was supplied with to the city. You can imagine how it boosted our influence.

When the Belarusian People's Front was being created some time later, all the green activists joined us. In 1989 a Democratic Forum began functioning. At the elections of people's deputies of the USSR in 1989 we did not nominate our own candidate, but the Soviet bureaucrat Mikalaj Dziemianciej lost the election in Navapolacak and secured his victory in the whole constituency only because the electorate in rural areas obediently voted for him.

But at the 1990 elections to the Supreme Soviet of Belarus all the three BPF candidates in Navapolacak won in a landslide. At the local elections eight candidates endorsed by the BPF became members of the regional council and we were able to create quite a powerful faction in the city council. About half of the city council members belonged to it.

To tell the truth, I was not going to stand for parliament. The well-known poet and bard Siaržuk Sakalou-Vojuš was to be nominated at our constituency, but some of the people at the citizens" meeting that nominated candidates had left before the procedure was over. There was no quorum. Siaržuk got the majority of voices, but the meeting was deemed invalid.

So I had to stand for parliament myself. I agreed because I was keen to block an ardent Belarusophobic Russian chauvinist, assistant professor of Marxist and Leninist philosophy Jemiallanau, endorsed by the communist party bureau of our institute. These events were taking place early in 1990.

Of course, communist bodies and officials gave me a hard time, to put it mildly, but not all people supported the official position. In this respect the prominent poet Hienadz Buraukin deserves special praise. The communists were going to nominate him for my constituency. Hienadz Buraukin understood all to well that if he had said no at once, they would have found someone more pliant, so he kept delaying his reply until the very last moment, when he said he would accept nomination for another constituency in Polacak, where there was no BPF candidate. I was elected people's deputy for Navapolacak in a tough competition with five other runners, including the first secretary of the Communist Party City Committee Uladzimir Pantalou.

When I came to the first session of the parliament, the Democratic Club was already operating in Minsk. It was there that I saw closely Zianon Pazniak the first time after the first BPF congress in Vilnia (Vilnius, now the capital of Lithuania.) When I was entering the Supreme Soviet building the first time I even felt a certain fear...'

Emotion-Driven Mistakes

"I am very emotional and take everything close to heart. I often get upset about trifles which I see as huge problems. When they are solved I begin to realise, however, that they were not all that grave...

I sometimes turned down offers of help and friendship from honest people but believed those who let me down later or were scheming from the very beginning.

Unfortunately, this is a fault that prevented me from achieving my potential as a political figure, which I quite honestly admit. I was influenced by people who shouldn't have been allowed to have any influence on me.

Moreover, I pinned too many hopes on education, believing that it could help bring up a better nation and we could change the people's mentality.

It has become evident in the last two decades that it is not all that easy. Mentality has been shaped for centuries and it is impossible to change it quickly.

When I am analysing the recent decades of my life I can see a string of mistakes rather than successes.

Here is one that I made as a politician during my term as a member of parliament. This is what happened after the state coup of 1991 failed and Gorbachev suspended the communist party from operating.

During the extraordinary session of parliament some deputies, including myself, were standing in the corridor when Prime Minister Viachaslau Kiebich came up and said, "I am going to resign". The former cosmonaut Uladzimir Kavalonak began talking him out of it. He said, "What is to become of us without you? You are the only person who can be the head of government at this hard time.'

I am now convinced that if I had involved all the other members of the opposition, it would have been possible to make Mr Kiebich resign. But I engaged in behind-the-scenes diplomacy instead, rushing to

ask Hienadz Karpienka[12] whether he would take on the position of the head of government if we took advantage of the situation and nominated him. Hienadz agreed, but when I got back Mr Kavalonak, who then belonged to the Democratic Club, had already talked Mr Kiebich out of resignation.

Who knows, perhaps the country's history could have taken a different course on 25 August 1991. Hienadz Karpienka might have managed to find common ground with both the "old regime" and Zianon Pazniak, whom he held in high esteem.

My other mistake was that I agreed to head the BPF after Zianon Pazniak had emigrated. I just couldn't say no to him, because he had left a letter in a secret place saying he saw nobody but me as his successor. But I have never had charisma that a leader needs. I am a very responsible person and always fulfil my assignments. But when others disobey me I try to do everything myself instead of them. Yet, one person just cannot do everything. You will be a bad leader if you don't make others work, too. Unfortunately, this was exactly my case.

This may have been the reason in why the BPF Party split up in 1999. If the party had been led by someone else the split-up might have been avoided.

I would like to mention one more mistake, which was characteristic not only of myself but also of my associates. We were sometimes deceived just because we wanted to. We should have taken a more principled and tough attitude, particularly towards the communist establishment. They sometimes said they supported us but in fact they did everything they could to undermine our efforts.

The examples were numerous, but let me remember just one. In the run-up to the presidential election of 1994 Zianon Pazniak, who was then a candidate for presidency, and I travelled to one of the districts. When we came into the office of the head of the district executive committee he had Pazniak's portrait and his book *The True Zianon Pazniak* on his table. That time the local boss asked Pazniak to autograph the book, but in1995 when the opposition deputies who had gone on a hunger strike were brutally beaten in the building of parliament he shouted the next day, bursting with hate, "You deserve it! It serves you right!" (By the way, Lukashenka dismissed him all the same.)

[12] Hienadź Karpienka was an influential democratically-minded deputy of the Supreme Soviet in 1990–1995 and vice-speaker of parliament in 1995–1996.

That is why I cannot agree with certain passages from Piotr Krauchanka's memoirs. We *worked* with the communist establishment, but of course we stood firm on our ideological ground. There was no intimidation. Our fault was that we couldn't see through people and were not on our guard, particularly when it came to possible betrayals.

When I agreed to head the BPF Party in 2007 once again that was one more fatal mistake. It is impossible to get into the same river twice, but I all the same tried to. My primary goal was to prevent Aleś Michalevich from being elected the party leader. He is of course a very smart person, but too ambitious and he has not gone through thick and thin yet. If you have only worked in the third sector people who have worked in plants, taught at universities or done research at the Academy of Sciences cannot hold you in high esteem. And these were exactly the personalities that made the core of the BPF Party at the time. When I look at the present party leadership I am deeply upset, because it does not include any members of the 1988 BPF Organising Committee, any former members of parliament, any members of the initial BPF leadership or for that matter anyone who is highly respected at work. (In fact, no one of the present leadership, with the exception of Ryhor Kastusiou, has ever had a job.)

I anticipated this kind of crisis in 2007 and rushed to lay my head on line like a kamikaze. Again, I was driven by emotions, something you shouldn't do in such matters.

Anyway, I did not have enough influence to bring the BPF Party back on the right track. A lot of committed and smart members of the party had pinned on me their hopes, which I did not fulfil.

In general, when I look back I have to admit that I have made more mistakes in my life than achievements.'

It Seemed Unreal

"The state coup in Moscow began on 19 August 1991. Of all the opposition members of parliament my place was the closest to the Supreme Soviet, so I was the first to get there as soon as I learnt about the coup. It was about 8 a.m.

I had already had an experience of a state of emergency. On 9 December 1981 I was teaching German at my institute when suddenly there was a knock on the door. An express messenger from the military enlistment

office handed me a call and a ticket to Minsk. I was being called up to the HQ of the Belarusian Military Command. They had read in my file that I knew Polish and prepared the papers for mobilisation. The military commanders said the situation in Poland was "extremely complicated" and they needed analyses of what was going on there.

A few other people and I were appointed sort of analysts. We prepared overviews of the Polish media, including opposition papers, like *Tygodnik Solidarność*, listened to the independent radio, watched videos and wrote reports that were then analysed in the "upper echelons".

The experience on the one hand made me sympathetic to the Polish *Solidarność* and its cause; on the other, I had a good idea how martial law is imposed. Tanks appeared in Polish streets the minute martial law was declared. So the day the coup in Moscow started the first thing I did was to rush to the window to see if there were any tanks outside. There were none.

Security was not tightened at the Supreme Soviet, where I met only Mr Shushkievich's aide Ivan Sciapura at such an early hour. A few minutes later MP Liavon Dziejka arrived and by 9 a.m. about a dozen other people from our faction had come to the parliament.

It is interesting that the democratic deputy Jauhien Hluškievich from Vorša bought a ticket for the first train to St Petersburg as soon as he learnt about the coup. He had worked together with Gennady Yannayev[13] at the Youth Organisations Committee and was on very bad terms with him. In St Petersburg Jauhien Hluškievich went at once to Mayor Anatoly Sobchak's office and sent us information about all the events in St Petersburg from there.

Our colleague Piotra Sadouski, the head of the Parliamentary Commission for International Affairs, received similar information by fax from the "White House'[14] in Moscow.

It was I who drafted our first resolution concerning the coup. After editing it a bit we gave the resolution to Ihar Hiermianchuk,[15] who managed to print a new issue of Svaboda in semi-underground conditions on the second day of the coup.

[13] Gennady Yannaev was among the hard-liners who attempted the state coup in Moscow in August 1991.

[14] The seat of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and later the Russian Federation in Moscow was nicknamed the White House in the early 1990s.

[15] Ihar Hiermiančuk was a member of the BPF opposition faction in the Supreme Soviet of Belarus in 1990–1995 and the editor-in-chief of the independent *Svaboda* paper.

On the first day, as soon as the speaker Mikalaj Dziemianciej turned up in his office, a delegation of the opposition went to see him at once. At that moment some higher force must have helped me, because when Ihar Hiermianchuk, may he rest in peace, was having doubts whether to take a recorder with him or not I insisted that he should. Mr Dziemianciej was so certain of the success of the coup that he did not even ask Ihar to switch off the recorder.

When the coup failed and Mr Dziemianciej tried to get away with it, the recording proved very useful. During the session of parliament we broadcast it live to the crowd that had gathered in the square in front of the building, so Mr Dziemianciej was forced to resign.

By the way, on the first day of the coup I took Uladzimir Kolas" offer of a job at the Belarusian Centre for the Humanities, Education and Culture, where a few new departments were being set up, including the well-known lyceum. I have always been faithful to this lyceum.

In the evening of 19 August 1991 Mikola Statkievich came to the rally we organised, having photocopied leaflets on the copying machine in the parliament and stuck them on lampposts near the Supreme Soviet. Mikola Statkievich was wearing his military uniform and he declared that not all the army supported the coup. It was a very brave act.

I was not the only person to whom it all seemed unreal. Zianon Pazniak said at the time, "It won't last more than three days". The first BPF leader may have many faults and I am far from idealising him, but I am convinced that if Zianon Pazniak had been elected to the 13th Supreme Soviet, President Lukashenka's reckless idea of a referendum to amend the Constitution would not have been accepted so easily! Anyway, the BPF leader, unlike some others, wouldn't have gone to play football at such a crucial moment in the county's history. Hieorhi Tarazievich, may he rest in peace, tried to do something to mobilise the members of parliament at that point, but considering that he was not a deputy, either, he did not have enough political weight.

The regime knew what it was doing when it directly involved the secret service to block Zianon Pazniak's election as a member of parliament for Smarhoń.'

The Most Important Choice

"But let us get back to the coup and what happened immediately afterwards. The BPF opposition insisted from the very beginning that

an extraordinary session of parliament should be summoned. To be fair, in the afternoon of 20 August 1991 Lukashenka arrived at the parliament. He did not sign our statements condemning the coup but he did attach his signature to an appeal to summon an extraordinary parliamentary session. His autograph can be found below two or three dozen other ones.

Two nights before the session we hardly had any sleep at all, drawing up pieces of legislation "for all occasions". Among them were the drafts of the laws on state independence, national symbols, the army, law enforcement, the KGB, etc.

To tell the truth, we only believed some fifty per cent that we would succeed in proclaiming Belarus a sovereign state and nobody believed that it was possible to block the work of the Belarusian Communist Party.

On the first day it was like banging our heads against a brick wall. Dziemianciej held on to his chair for dear life, saying "You got it all wrong”. There was no progress being made concerning resignation of the speaker who had supported the coup and the tables were not turned until the evening.

In the evening rumours began to be spread that Gorbachev had suspended the communist party from functioning. There were no official reports yet but the news was already being passed behind the scenes by word of mouth. The terrified communist establishment in Belarus felt they should do something to save their necks, so they "sacrificed" Dziemianciej. The next morning he resigned.

There was a sign of relief. Then we began at once pushing the independence issue, but there was little progress. The chairman announced a break. I do not know what happened but after the break one of the most orthodox communist deputies for the Homiel region called Michail Machulenka suddenly suggested that the parliament "vote for all Pazniak’s proposals". We were shocked, to put it mildly. The tables were turned.

After another break Prime Minister Kiebich spoke in the same vein about the proposals the opposition had made and put on the agenda a draft resolution to declare economic and political sovereignty of Belarus that had been drawn up by the government. The resolution also had a provision that all Belarus-based bodies subordinated to Moscow should be subordinated to the Belarusian government instead.

The debate was meaningful but relatively brief and finally at 8:08 p.m. the outcome of the most vital vote was announced: BELARUS BECAME AN INDEPENDENT STATE. The next day the news made the headlines. In the evening of 25 August thousands of people greeted us near the building of parliament. Among them was my friend Uladzimir Arlou, the well-known writer who had his birthday that very day. I remember somebody giving him a chunk of granite chipped off the building of the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist party. As far as I know, Uladzimir Arlou still keeps the present.

A few hours before, without consulting Zianon Pazniak, I had asked the secretariat of the Supreme Soviet to photocopy the draft law on national symbols that we had drawn up. While it was being distributed to the deputies, a communist deputy from Viciebsk Uladzimir Kulakou insisted that the issue should not be "pushed". He said the parliament would get back to this point later, but at that moment "everyone was very tired".

The parliament did get back to the issue of national symbols during the next session, but the progress was made very slowly. The communist establishment had recovered from shock by then.

Ironically, we needed Viktar Sheiman's voice to make the historical white-red-white flag and the *Pahonia* coat of arms the national symbols of Belarus. The thing is that the opponents of the idea, mainly deputies of the older generation, challenged his voice. To make such amendments in the legislation, a constitutional majority of 230 voices was required. It was Viktar Sheiman who turned out to be number 230 and he confirmed in public that he had voted for the historical symbols.

By the way, the Law on Citizenship was adopted in the same session. Two thirds of the text was taken verbatim from the draft proposed by the BPF faction. I had drawn up the biggest part of it. It still makes me proud, even though some of its provisions are breached, especially when it come to athletes applying for Belarusian citizenship.

I remember well that even Viachaslau Kiebich said at the meeting of parliament on 25 August, "We have been doing without the Soviet Union for a year already, getting no assistance from the metropolis. We'll be able to do without it altogether..." Later on he would write in his memoirs that someone had "got him wrong".

The first international reaction to what had happened then came on 3 September 1991, when the Polish Diet made a statement to support Belarusian sovereignty. However, it did not mean diplomatic recognition

yet. The first state to recognise formally the independence of Belarus was Turkey. This happened after the agreement on the disintegration of the USSR and creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was signed in Viskuli, Belarus, by the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. It is a shame historians today "don't remember" that.

Some Russian chauvinists are eager to view the collapse of the USSR as the result of "American" or "Western" schemes. Quite on the contrary, the Americans were afraid of the possible proliferation of nuclear weapons. If I remember right, the USA was the fifth to recognise the sovereignty of Belarus.

As for the present situation, it is of course very upsetting to see what is happening to Belarusian assets, but it is not going to last forever. What matters is that one day it will be possible to reclaim them, and the legal grounds for that were laid on 25 August 1991.

There have been a number of precedents in history, such as Finland, Mongolia, Poland and the Baltic states.

I am sure that some time in future things will resume their normal course.'

Conclusion

For quite obvious reasons I couldn't fit everything Liavon Barshcheuski said during a three-hour interview into the book, but there is one point that needs special attention. In my opinion, it reveals one of the major reasons why the opposition is always losing.

Liavon Barshcheuski put it very precisely, "In our situation politics must be put on a professional track. In theory a team of football amateurs can defeat professionals, should the latter keep falling, getting injured and missing the goal, while the amateurs have good luck all the time. It can happen, but only once in two centuries.

1991 and the following years only supported this simple truth. The professionals got mobilised, and only a professional team could have challenged them. The opposition failed to go on winning just by pushing hard or relying on nothing more than enthusiasm. It has to be realised, however, that only the general public can produce professional politicians. They can emerge only in close contact with the public rather than in exile or at brainstorming sessions.'

VALERY FRALOU



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When ten years ago the deputy of the House of Representatives and a retired General Valery Fralou called himself "a young politician", it sounded rather funny. His real political debut happened in 1991, when the commander of the 107th Motorized Rifle Division and the head of the Vilnius garrison General Fralou refrained from cooperating with Moscow emissaries from State Committee on the State of Emergency.
It was a political decision, which got even more important in the situation when General Fralou replaced General Uskhopchyk in Lithuania. The extradition of the latter is demanded by Lithuanian authorities even today, while General Fralou is being invited to all sorts of meetings and TV shows. Political polygons of Belarusian opposition politician, deputy chairman of Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Gramada) Valery Fralou are no less complex than the tank polygons...

First stars

His father Dzmitry stayed in Minsk after the war. His mother Nadzeya was born near Pukhavichy, Minsk region. On August 14, 1947 a boy named Valery was born into their family.
After the seventh grade Valery entered the Automotive Technical School. After that he worked at MAZ (Minsk Automobile Plant) and, like many boys, dreamed of becoming an intelligence officer. In the military registration and enlistment office he found out that schools of similar profile were situated only in Alma-Ata and prepared its students to be future prison guards.
Romantic dreams got instantly dispelled. So Valery chose the Kharkov Tank School, which he graduated from in 1970. Being one of the best

students, he could choose any place where to serve, but he returned to Belarus — to the well-known Barouka near Lepel. He was the commander of a platoon and of a company.
Eighteen months later he got married. The marriage proved durable. Unfortunately, in 2003 the disease brought Natallya Fralova to death.
Valery Fralou met his second wife through politics. More precisely, thanks to an article about him in "Narodnaya Volya". He called the author Natallya Kupreyeva to thank for the article. Word after word, then a meeting, then a spark of sympathy, and finally the marriage...

Stars on the shoulder straps

The military career of Valery Fralou, though quite rapid (like the one of some generals" sons), was quite successful. He made his way up with the help of his own mind, will and great diligence. In 1974 Fralou entered the Academy of Armored Forces.
After the graduation he had served in the Far East for 12 years, six of which he commanded a regiment. Standard time for this period of career was two times shorter. But here is a special case. In Soviet times the relationship between commanders and political workers were often not really good. Valery Fralou’s relations with the head of the political department of the division were so tense, that once even a fight broke out.
It could become the de facto end of his career. He was saved by military exercises. Deputy District Commander was so impressed by Valery Fralou’s regiment actions that he appreciated it very high, saying: "I haven’t seen anything of the kind since the World War II”. As a result, Valery Fralou was promoted.
By the way, Colonel Leonid Maltsau, who later became Defense Minister and now heads the National Security Council, commanded their division at that time. In 1989 he sent Valery Fralou in to the Military Academy of the General Staff.
Then he was sent to Vilnius. Among the subordinates of Valery Fralou was the Chief of Staff and missile forces of the Vilnius garrison, the future president of the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria Aslan Maskhadov. Valery Fralou had to meet and solve questions with Communists like Mr. Ermalavichius and Mr. Burakavichius as well as with a Social Democrat Mr. Brazauskas, the leader of the "Sąjūdis" Mr. Landsbergis, and with many other politicians in Lithuania.

From military to politics

With all the negative attitude of the founders of independent Lithuania to the former Soviet Army they have certain respect to the person of General Fralou that speaks for itself. Only last year Fralou visited the Lithuanian capital thrice. Once he was invited by the Lithuanian television, which was filming a program about the events which took place twenty years ago.

At that risky situation General Fralou took the only correct mission, i.e. the mission of a peacekeeper. It was the decision of a wise politician, but relying on military force of a general. It was he who had brought out from Vilnius the members of the Communist Party of Lithuania. And he persuaded Moscow OMON to move beyond the walls of the garrison. Two weeks later, when the situation got calmer, he brought them out of Lithuania. "These men — says General — would not have given up just like that. And this means blood, death, proliferation of the conflict with Russia. And the peaceful separation from Russia and independence of Lithuania might not have taken place".

General Fralou's actions, I think, made Moscow rather happy too. And after the Soviet withdrawal from Lithuania General Fralou was offered the position of division commander in Tallinn. However, the national Army of Belarus had been created and Valery Fralou turned down the Russian proposition.

At the beginning, the first Belarusian Defense Minister Pavel Kazlouski sent him to serve in Babruisk and 1.5 years later moved him to Hrodna to become the Army Corps commander and to replace Leonid Maltsau, who had been promoted.

It was in 1994, shortly before the presidential elections. Therefore, after Alexander Lukashenka's victory, the military expected some changes, because traditionally the Army serves to the current government, which at that time was represented by the Prime Minister Vyachaslau Kebich. And Alexander Lukashenka was an opposition candidate.

To the surprise of the military, including General Fralou, the new president did not make great changes in the army personnel. Valery Fralou had served as the commander of the armored corps for six years. Although he didn't demonstrate special loyalty on many issues and expressed his private opinion.

He was made to retire in early 2000. It's quite interesting, that this happened at a time when Valery Fralou presented his research in

the Academy of Management under the President of Belarus, and immediately after he sent a letter to the president on the rationale for reforms in the Belarusian army.

A few months later there were the next parliamentary elections, and Valery Fralou decided to go into politics.

Tank policy

It is well-known how elegant victories are achieved. But several factors helped Mr. Fralou to get the parliamentary mandate. At that time, the mechanism of the electoral system was not as perfectly polished. Valery Fralou was still far from the opposition. The general rank in the eyes of the authorities was still perceived as a guarantee of loyalty. They added up to his credibility in the eyes of electorate, which was reinforced by the general's democratic nature and active meetings with voters. But he would hardly have overcome all the difficulties without support of his friend — Hrodna Governor Alexander Dubko.

However, it didn't take Mr. Fralou long time to realize that the so-called "parliamentarians", according to his definition, play the role of backup dancers for the Presidential Administration legal "hits" and one person can't change the situation.

In the spring of 2001 a deputy group "Respublika" was formed. It originally consisted of twelve people and apart from the well-known Uladzimir Parfianovich and Siarhei Skrabets included deputy head of the presidential administration, the Attorney General, Chairman of the KGB in Brest region, two chairmen of executive committees, some very influential businessmen and others. Each of them had their own motivation, but it seems that the general basis was the feeling of self-esteem and disagreement to play the role of "backup dancers".

I do not want to argue with the ardent advocates of the existing stability, but after three "Republicans" found themselves behind bars, and the former head of the parliamentary group was twice beaten and got a fine of 3.5 thousand USD, it would be good to think what the price of such stability is. And what retribution awaits them.

Let me remind you of a hunger strike of three members of the "Republic" (Mr. Fralou, Mr. Skrabets and Mr. Parfianovich) against Lukashenka's intentions to get a third term in June 2004. It was the last opposition action of Belarusian deputies.

A few months later they lost their parliamentary powers, and all five subsequent attempts of Valery Fralou to get parliamentary mandate have been successfully neutralized. The authorities didn’t want to repeat their mistakes.

Within legal boundaries

The Parliamentary elections in 2004 urged Valery Fralou to join an opposition party. It happened when due to the work of special services Fralou suddenly didn’t get enough signatures to be registered as a candidate. He appealed for help to the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Narodnaya Gramada", which then was headed by Mikola Statkevich. They had a talk and Mr. Fralou applied to the party. Thus the ideological affinity materialized in the party one.

Valery Fralou is among those who support Irina Veshtard nowadays. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that he has been elected Deputy Chairman of the party. I will not confuse readers with names and I take any side in the disputes on the Social Democrats" split. I will only refer to Mr Fralou’s words: "There are many chiefs, but few Indians".

Perhaps, in politics it is always difficult to say what you think. Several times I witnessed situations when the words of the General were appreciated neither by the opposition nor by the authorities. The only difference is that the government pays special attention to the former military officers. Apparently the authorities know who is a real threat and who is only a virtual one.

Valery Fralou has recently organized two informal meetings of former soldiers. He gathered up to 50-60 people. And nearly twice as more law-enforcement officers were waiting for a corresponding command to attack the gathering in a building nearby. However, it was useless, because it is well known that Valery Fralou fundamentally adheres to the evolutionary algorithm in politics. His credo is to act always in the framework of the existing legislation, even if it is not very favorable for the opposition community nowadays.

ANDREJ KLIMAU



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There may be some debate as to who is the richest businessman in Belarus, but Andrej Klimau is undoubtedly the champion in sufferings. He is also beyond competition as the one who has suffered the greatest losses.
In the mid-1990s Andrej Klimau was among the top five best known businessmen in Belarus. Then came long years in prison. Why?
I hope his profile gives an answer to this question.

From the Family of the Nobility

Andrej Klimau is a bit upset about when he was born, particularly that it was in the 20th century. 17 September 1965 was not the best day in Belarusian history. Andrej Klimau would rather have been born in the Middle Ages in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where the people in power did not throw into prison those who wished happiness to their fatherland.
The boy did well at school in the first three forms, until sport became for him a priority. It was not only because his mother had arranged for her son to go to a sports school where he had training sessions in swimming twice a day. After training he also played football or ice hockey. In other words, there was hardly any time left for studies, as is often the case.
What happened to his schools hardly qualifies as typical, either. At first the boy went to School No. 28 for three years, then he spent a year at School No. 35 and finally went to School No. 61.
Ala Klimava, the mother of the future political figure, comes from the renowned Pyvovarov family of Ukrainian nobility. There were times

when they were rather rich, but Ala inherited from her ancestors a bit different kind of fortune. I mean the richness of soul.

It may sound too grandiloquent but it is very hard to find ordinary words to express my deepest respect for this person. And for all mothers whose children have paid a high price for their refusal to be "a trembling creature", in Dostoyevsky's words.

Andrej remembers that his mother was never unwilling to spend money on three things: fruit, holidays and books.

The books are of crucial importance, for reading non-stop shaped Andrej Klimau's personality and character.

In the Soviet times a lot of goods were in short supply, but books were probably among the most highly-prized things. To buy a really popular book, you had to deliver twenty kilos of scrap paper to be recycled and get a card which entitled you to the book. Andrej Klimau bought in this way about 200 books.

Youthful Folly

Although Andrej Klimau was not a top pupil, in 1983 he finished school with pretty good grades and began thinking what to do next. When he was in high school he had done a course in English at the House of Officers, which was considered very prestigious at the time. Maybe that was the reason why he decided to apply to Moscow State Institute of International Relations, probably the most high-status university in the USSR where only the children of the establishment were normally accepted.

It was a bold decision. And it was youthful folly, too, because the institute required applicants to produce a letter of recommendation from their local YCL committee so as to separate the elite from commoners. It was the first time Andrej Klimau had turned up at the YCL committee, so they turned him down there, which was to be expected.

The young man had hardly ever been faced with the Soviet practices before. For two months he was in deep depression. He did not want to see anyone and dreamt of being sent to Afghanistan to do his military service in order to die a hero's death there.

His mother sensed what Andrej was going through and told him about L'viv Fire Fighters" College.

Andrej Klimau graduated from it with honours in 1986. A lot earlier another prominent figure in Belarusian politics had graduated from there. It was the Speaker of the 12th Supreme Soviet Miechyslau Hryb.

A Problem of Adult Life

Andrej Klimau was sent to Minsk, where he worked for year as a watch commander at Fire Station No. 5. From the very first day there the young lieutenant was indignant at quite a lot of things, particularly at his subordinates, including drivers, coming to work intoxicated.

Andrej Klimau began to strengthen discipline, so that soon the station commander introduced a new type of punishment for those who breached the rules, appointing them to Klimau's assignment.

L'viv Fire Fighters" College does not give a university degree, so after a year at the fire station Andrej Klimau went to the HR of the Minsk Department of Internal Affairs and asked for a letter of recommendation to the School of History of the Belarusian State University.

This was a very unconventional choice for a fire fighter, to put it mildly. You can imagine the surprise on the faces of the HR people and the language they used to advise him to go to the Higher School of Fire Fighters. Andrej Klimau wouldn't. They reached a compromise and agreed on the School of Law of the Belarusian State University.

It was in 1987, but Andrej Klimau was able to graduate from university only in 2010, after three terms in prison. Andrej himself speaks of four terms, as he was arrested in 2006 right in Barshchouka, where he had been sent under the terms of custodial restraint, for allegedly "using bad language". He was locked up in prison in Rechyca for a week.

It was no coincidence that this happened on the voting day of the presidential election.

A Risky Choice

I am not going to describe all the steps of Andrej Klimau's short but very successful career as a fire fighter. It hardly brought him any moral satisfaction. Three years later he already held an important position at the Main Directorate for Fire Guard of the Belarusian Ministry of Internal Affairs, but he resigned as soon as he returned from his first trip abroad.

Even though he had been to the socialist Poland, his impressions there were enough to let him sense what true freedom could be like.

Andrej Klimau resigned on 21 August 1991 and three months later, on 26 November 1991, he started his own business. It was called the Small Enterprise of Andrej Klimau and dealt in real estate, urban development, finance, engineering and consulting services.

In 1994 it formed the basis of Andrej Klimau and Co. Ltd, Minsk Private Bank of Andrej Klimau and *Andrej Klimau" Newspaper.*

I have heard different opinions about the names of his businesses, including rather diagnoses than opinions. Personally, I do not see anything wrong here, because the owner of a business must be prepared to stake his name and reputation on it.

Besides, in the Middle Ages it was considered a matter of decency. You may have seen bricks with imprints of master craftsmen's hands in the ruins of old castles. These were a kind of signature and quality guarantee.

The same is true about the name.

1995 marked the beginning of a political dimension in Andrej Klimau's life. A lot of people have their reservations about well-known businessmen's credentials as members of parliament, and with good reason. However, Andrej Klimau was an exception. He did not only win in fair competition during the elections to the 13th Supreme Soviet of Belarus, but also proved more than once with his actions that he was guided by his own conscience and the interests of the electorate.

This is more than just words from a leaflet. This was the basis of three criminal cases against Andrej Klimau.

Pessimistic Optimism

In 1996 Andrej Klimau, then a member of the Commission for Economic Policies and Reforms, signed a demand to impeach Lukashenka. This is thought to have been the real cause of the first criminal case against him, even if the formal charges were different.

Andrej Klimau was arrested on 11 February 1998 and sentenced on 17 March 2000 to six years in prison for stealing from himself (sic!) a large sum of money and thus committing a grand theft. At first he had been charged with unlicensed business activities, but the charge was dropped. Of course, the judicial system in present-day Belarus is very unconventional.

Andrej Klimau was released on parole on 25 March 2002. Three years later, on 25 March 2005, he held in Kastrychnickaja Square in Minsk what he called a Revolution, to be put behind bars again.

Andrej Klimau was sentenced to eighteen months of custodial restraint. At first he was sent to Krupki near Minsk, which made it easy for his friends from the opposition to visit him, so Klimau was transferred to Barshchouka in the Rechyca district of the Homiel region. There Andrej was faced with the "pre-emptive measures" that we have already described.

At the 2006 presidential election Andrej Klimau cast his voice in prison in Rechyca.

In December 2006 he had served his time in custodial restraint but he did not stay free for long. Three months later Andrej Klimau was arrested again, this time for alleged "contempt of the President" in his book *Walking with the Vampire* and for a call "to change the existing regime in an unconstitutional manner". All in all Andrej has written nine books so far.

He was arrested on 3 April 2007 and on 1 August the same year the Centralny District Court in Minsk sentenced the former parliamentarian to two years in high security prison. The court delivered a verdict that the book was to be destroyed.

Andrej Klimau was the first opposition politician in Belarus to do time in high security prison.

He spent six months in prison in Valadarski Street in Minsk, where he had a heart attack and was put into prison hospital. From there he was transferred to high security prison camp No. 20 near Mazyr. Then the political situation changed a bit and Andrej Klimau was granted pardon by a presidential decree.

Someone else would probably have stopped his activities after such trials. But not Andrej Klimau. In 2010 he joined the movement "For Freedom" and is now indignant when anybody talks about his withdrawal from public life.

Andrej Klimau views the situation in Belarus with a kind of pessimistic optimism. He believes that changes will be brought in soon but worries that we are unprepared for them.

It is also important that in 1997 Andrej Klimau joined the United Civic Party and still remains its member.

In 2012 Andrej Klimau founded Destkom Investment Company which represents an English foundation called Mainerinvestment. The company prepares investment sites for building plants, hotels and shopping malls, as well as sets up banks.

As time passes the list of Andrej Klimau's positions will probably get longer, but it is sure not to include one post. Andrej Klimau has taken a firm decision not to be the President of Belarus. It is a rare thing for an opposition figure in Belarus to be unwilling to rise to power, which shows that luckily there are still some people who put others" interests ahead of their own.

ANATOL LIABIEDZKA



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This politician has been the bull's-eye of an easy target for criticism. I could attack him, too. After all, I have known him for about twenty years and there are a lot of things to criticise him for. But I am not going to, for I think it would be more logical to try and understand his underlying motives.

No Mistakes-1

Anatol Liabiedzka was born on 27 June 1961 in the village of Tryles in the Stoubcy district of the Minsk region.

I was lucky to visit Anatol's little homeland a lot of times. The first thing that impressed me was that his parents treated guests with outstanding sincerity. No less sincere were they in their attitude to life in general.

His mother's name was Maryja but everybody called her Janina. Anatol always said of his father, "He works as a kulak.'[16] Unfortunately, he passed away on 26 October 2012, but a lot of people cherish his memory and have the deepest respect to this person in their hearts. He was really a good farmer.

He couldn't stay idle for a single moment and you couldn't help being impressed by how hard he worked. On top of a small piece of land that the Soviet regime allowed peasants to cultivate, he always had several illegal plots in the forest, where he would uproot trees and undergrowth and sow rye with his own tractor. He was very happy when the chairman of the collective farm was able to find and destroy only half of them.

[16] In the early decades of the Soviet regime *kulak* was a term for a rich farmer.

If harvest-home had been celebrated then on the same scale as it is under the Lukashenka regime Anatol and his father could have easily won a car as a reward, for one summer they harvested over a thousand tons of grain.

No Mistakes-2

When Anatol finished school in 1978 he tried to get admission to university but failed at the exams. He worked for a year as a machinery operator at the collective farm in his native village. Then he studied at the preparatory department of Minsk Teacher Training Institute and in 1980 he went to study at the School of History of this institute, where his majors were history and French. He graduated in 1985. (On 8 September 1993 the institute obtained a university status, and in 1995 it was renamed the Maksim Tank Belarusian State Pedagogical University.)

When Anatol Liabiedzka was a student he met his future wife Śviatlana, who was studying in another group. They got married on 22 September 1984. A year later he was called up. He was doing his military service in Air Defence Forces when he learnt that his son Arciom was born on 9 December 1985.

Upon graduation Anatol Liabiedzka wanted to do a postgraduate course but preference was given to the daughter of a deputy minister, so Anatol went to Ashmiany, where his mother-in-law was living at the time.

It was in Ashmiany that Anatol Liabiedzka turned from a teacher into a politician. It happened in 1990. A few young like-minded people suggested that the deputy headmaster of a boarding school stand for parliament.

Despite a strong resistance of the local communist establishment and tough competition among the ten candidates in his constituency, Anatol Liabiedzka and his team won in a landslide. 76% of voters cast their votes for the young teacher. It was a time when votes were counted more fairly than they are now, with Lukashenka's appointees Lidzija Jarmoshyna and Mikalaj Lazavik at the head of the Central Election Commission.

As deputy head of the Commission for Families and Young People of the 12th Supreme Soviet of Belarus Anatol Liabiedzka had to move to Minsk, but a lot of people in Ashmiany still think of him as "their guy".

In 1992 Anatol Liabiedzka initiated the creation of the Belarusian

Association of Young Politicians and became its leader. In 1999 the association ceased to exist because it had not been granted re-registration.

When the prominent journalist Anatol Majsienia met his untimely end Anatol Liabiedzka was elected chairperson of the Belarusian Euro-Atlantic Association in 1997. This organisation does no longer exist, either. After all, times have changed and Belarus has chosen different allies.

It soon became clear that a teacher's degree was not enough for big politics, so in 1993 Anatol Liabiedzka graduated from the School of Law of the Belarusian State University.

In 1995 he once again stood for parliament in the Ashmiany constituency and once again won in the first round. As soon as he was elected he went to the side of the opposition to Lukashenka and joined the newly established United Civic Party. At first Anatol Liabiedzka was a deputy chairperson and on 15 April 2000 he became the leader of the party after Prof Stanislau Bagdankevich resigned.

Mistake 1

This mistake has a name that everybody in Belarus knows. And Anatol Liabiedzka was not the only one to make it. He was wrong when he decided to support Alexander Lukashenka during the first-ever presidential campaign in 1994.

However, it was not all that clear at the time as it appears now. It would be useful to start analysing what happened in 1994 by seeing the difference between the era of perestroika and the present period. It would be wrong to look at Anatol Labiadźka then from today's perspective and overestimate his power. It is just as wrong of Anatol Labiadźka to fail to admit his mistakes.

I am convinced that if he had done so years ago, today we wouldn't have heard of the "young wolves" who wanted to rule the country behind the scenes.

Unfortunately, it did not happen and we have actually forgotten now that in 1994 democrats did not join their forces and nominate one candidate to oppose the head of Belarusian government Viachaslau Kiebich.

There were three opposition candidates: Zianon Paźniak, Stanislau SHushkievich and Hienadź Karpienka. All the three collected a

hundred thousand voters" signatures for their nomination, required for registration as candidates. However, a number of signatures for Hienadź Karpienka were annulled as allegedly invalid so that he couldn't be registered as a presidential candidate. Hienadź Karpienka also collected signatures of parliamentarians (the minimum required by law was seventy) but some of them later withdrew their signatures. Anatol Liabiedzka was among those who signed the papers for Hienadź Karpienka's nomination but he did not withdraw his signature.

The fact that democrats failed to join their forces made Lukashenka's task easier, because a lot of people then were guided by a simple principle, "Anyone is better than Kiebich.'

It is emblematic that Hienadź Karpienka was prevented from participating in the run for presidency not by Lukashenka's followers but by the supporters of the first speaker of parliament of independent Belarus Stanislau Shushkevich.

I think it would be wrong to blame the "young wolves" exclusively for what had happened. In their actions they were guided by the expectations of the majority. It would be logical if that very majority were held responsible in the court of history.

Mistake 2

If the first mistake Anatol Liabiedzka made can be explained and his reasoning can be accepted, the second cannot be easily justified. I mean that in 2010 the United Civic Party nominated Jaraslau Ramanchuk as a presidential candidate.

However, there were some reasons for that step, too. The main one is that in 2010 the opposition once again did not reach an agreement, even though the procedure for nominating one democratic candidate had been approved a year before the election. So "why shouldn't the UCP take part in "the parade of candidates"? After all, Ramanchuk was the only economist among them.'

Anatol Liabiedzka has no serious objections to the way the presidential campaign was run in terms of publicity for the party. He objects to what happened afterwards.

According to Anatol Liabiedzka, "What happened went counter to my principles and ideals. Of course I cannot support it but can only condemn. But I am not going to trample over those who showed weakness there. I said that as soon as I was released from the

notorious KGB prison called "Amierykanka" because I had had a first-hand experience of it. I had 108 days to see what people face there.'

The Wrong Myths

Myth 1. Liabiedzka wanted to be the Foreign Minister but was offered only the position of the Minister of Education, according to the official version. According to Anatol Liabiedzka himself, nothing of the kind could have happened by definition, because he supported another candidate for the position of the Foreign Minister, namely Uladzimir Siańko. On top of that, Anatol Liabiedzka soon received another post, which was completely independent from the executive. He became deputy chairperson of the Commission for International Affairs.

Myth 2 says that Anatol Liabiedzka worked as the "president's representative in the parliament". In actual fact if you read the minutes of all the meetings of the 13th Supreme Soviet, it becomes evident that there is not a single line in them about "voicing the position of the President". Furthermore, during the 1995 parliamentary elections the executive did not only stay away from Anatol Liabiedzka's campaign but also openly hampered his election by producing two opponents from their ranks.

If he had disavowed what was being said about his status as the president's representative then, today there would be no doubts about it. Unfortunately, he didn't. One can only guess why.

Myth 3 says that Anatol Liabiedzka sided with the opposition because he had not received any posts in the government he wanted. It is true that he had been offered certain positions more than once. The most tempting one was the head of the Presidential Council but for a number of reasons nothing came out of it.

He was offered the posts of the chairperson of the Customs Committee, Deputy Prime Minister and the Youth Minister but it all led nowhere.

In December 1994 newspapers came out with blank spots after being censured and in April 1995 the BPF opposition deputies were beaten in the building of parliament. It became clear that the Belarusian society was being polarised. Anatol Liabiedzka was one of those who suggested seeking a compromise. Lukashenka even agreed to have an inclusive round table discussion, but the next morning he went back on his decision. It happened in the summer of 1995, the moment that marked a split-up between the two politicians.

In Order to Make No Mistakes

In March 2005 Alaksandr Milinkievich was nominated the joint opposition candidate for the presidency after defeating Anatol Liabiedzka at the Convention of Democratic Forces with a margin of eight votes. In October 2005 the Political Council of Democratic Forces appointed Anatol Liabiedzka the chairperson of the National Committee, which came to be called "a shadow government".

This episode vividly shows that if there is a will there is a way even for the Belarusian opposition figures to reach an agreement. However, it happens only too seldom.

This is, of course, a shame. For example, I spent half an hour listening to what the difference is between primaries and "the national referendum" and I still couldn’t see the essential difference between the two. It will probably be even more difficult to explain the difference to the electorate.

RAISA MIKHAILOUSKAYA



Prepared for publication 25.02.2013

I have great respect to any and all of modern Belarusian human rights activists, but among them there are those whose names and deeds are beyond our attention. This is because they are primarily focused on their business and completely ignore the PR. One of them is the heroine of this story.

European start

Raisa Mikhailouskaya was born in Klaipeda — a city which is now in the EU. Her parents met and married in Lithuania, and on March 3, 1960, their second daughter Raisa was born (the first one — Svetlana — is three years older).

Piotr Masherau, which at that time was the second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, called her father "the moustached tankman". They met during rather dramatic events caused by a massive reduction in the army (mainly of the tank units), which was initiated in the early 1960s by Nikita Khrushchev. Raisa's father — Captain Kanstantsin Humerau got under this reduction as well. The reason for that might be a paragraph in the questionnaire, where he honestly wrote that his father (Raisa's grandfather) was convicted as an "enemy of the people".

Thousands of officers got under Khrushchov's reduction of armies. Minsk, which has always been considered very attractive for the military, felt it very quickly. The Ministry of Defence left the problem to be solved by "the civilians". A group of representatives of affected soldiers, which included Kanstantsin Gumerau, met Piotr Masherau. As a result, an apartment block for the military officers was allotted in Zavodski district of Minsk.This is how Raisa's parents stayed in Belarus.

Belarusian continuation

Raisa's mother Irina Kanash comes from Kalyadzichy, which is near Minsk. So, the apartment in the Belarusian capital meant for her the actual return to her homeland. The city where she got to as a three-month baby became native for Raisa.

Zavadski district is one of the most proletarian districts in Minsk. So were the pupils, who studied at high school No.43 along with Raisa. However, in spite of everything, Raisa considers her school years really great.

In winter they worked at the Minsk Bearing Plant (polishing sticks for flags), making money to hire a tour bus, and in the summer for almost a month they visited "literary" places: Yasnaya Polyana, Spasskoe-Lutavinovo, Chekhov, Melihovo, Kishineu, Odessa etc. Not every elite class can boast of such a travel.

All Raisa Mikhailouskaya's classmates have become respected people. There are bankers, businessmen, engineers, teachers, journalists and lawyers among them.

Raisa has always been a leader, in studies (she was an A-student), as well as in the social activities. But what is most important — her official position was fully consistent with the actual one. She was respected (and is respected now) by teachers and classmates. After leaving school the classmates of Raisa Mikhailouskaya had been gathering almost with full complement for a long time. And now many of her classmates are sincere and reliable friends.

At school Raisa loved maths, so the choice of the Mechanical and Mathematical Faculty of BSU in 1977 was quite logical. In 1982 she got her first job as a junior researcher at the research laboratory of computing systems of the Belarusian State University. She was engaged in the development of software systems, and was even awarded a silver medal of ENEA USSR for it.

Then Raisa Mikhailouskaya became a software engineer in "Western Construction Industry Exchange".

Raisa is in her second marriage now, that's why she has the surname Mikhailouskaya. And the first one was during her studies at BSU. In the fourth year Raisa married her classmate Ihar. Unfortunately, their marriage broke up, but they were able to maintain a cordial relationship until Ihar's death. From this marriage Raisa has a daughter, Katsiaryna, who gave birth to a beautiful girl Ulyana a few years ago, and recently to a son Tsimur.

Turning to human rights

There are many examples when people dramatically change their lives. It happened to Raisa Mikhailouskaya. Moreover, it happened twice to her. In 1993 she went to work in publishing joint venture "Moka Dalfing". Initially she was responsible for computer layout and design, and a year later she became the head of the publishing department.

In 1995 she was invited as chief of publishing and printing department to another well-known company — "Krasika-Print", owned by a businessman Anatol Krasousky. The very Anatol Krasousky, who in 1999 tragically disappeared together with Viktar Hanchar.

The 1990s are called "evil years". Because of the apartment scam, the victim of which was Raisa's sister, Mrs. Mikhailouskaya got acquainted with the human rights activist Aleh Volchak. At that time he was a member of the Minsk City Council and as a lawyer actively helped the victims.

Soon it became clear that Aleh and Raisa, as well as some of their colleagues, have similar approaches to life. Thus the idea appeared to unite in a human rights organization. In the summer of 1998, the proponents gathered for a constituent assembly, and on September 10 the Ministry of Justice registered the "Legal Assistance to the Population" NGO.

When officials handed the license to provide legal aid to the layers, they sincerely congratulated and praised them for the noble work. Probably at that time nobody could imagine that in five years, almost these same people (with the help of the court) would deprive the organization, uncontrollable for authorities, of official registration.

Raisa Mikhailouskaya was the executive director of "Legal Assistance to the Population", as well as the founder and the chief editor of the "Citizen and Law" newspaper. A lot of newsletters, books and brochures on legal subjects were issued with her active participation.

At the same time a commission to investigate the disappearance of the former Interior Minister of Belarus Yury Zakharanka was created.

This kind of activity required proper knowledge, and it is logical that Raisa went to study jurisprudence at the Minsk Institute of Management. She also attained advanced training courses abroad, e.g. in Warsaw, in the U.S., and in Canada.

Raisa's relations with Iryna Kazulina are also worth mentioning. I will not enumerate all the actions Raisa undertook to release Alexander

Kazulin, but I’m sure it happened also because of the fact that people like Raisa Mikhailouskaya fought for him sincerely.

Her own experience

In 2008 "the most poetic human rights activist" of our time Vera Stramkouskaya got married and moved to her husband to Sweden. Before leaving, she offered Raisa Mikhailouskaya to become the leader of the Human Rights Centre. She agreed and headed it until 2012.

I will not cover any internal conflicts and take anybody’s side. I want to note only that it is much easier to take a structure under control than to keep it under control afterwards.

During the 2010 presidential election Raisa Mikhailouskaya accepted an offer to work in the legal department of the electoral headquarters of Uladzimir Niakliaeu. I quite understand this choice of the best poet of our time. Besides thorough legal knowledge Mrs. Mikhailouskaya had real personal experience.

She had participated in the election campaigns of other candidates for four times, and in 2003 she tried to become a deputy herself. The case, when two days before the election she was removed from participation in the elections for wrapping her portrait in cellophane (to protect it from rain) and thus exceeded the allowable sum of funds, was recorded by every monitoring of the elections.

Again, I do not want to offend anyone, but in this case I basically agree with those who believe that participating in a campaign is more valuable than watching it from outside. In this case, despite the beating and arrest of Uladzimir Niakliaeu, Raisa’s own experience helped to create and submit to the Central Election Commission a justified complaint about the elections being invalid on behalf of the arrested presidential candidates. Her own experience also came in handy when Mrs. Mikhailouskaya started helping lawyers and relatives of those arrested in December 2010.

Homemade "menology"

In October 2012 the "Belarusian Documentation Centre" started its work. It was created and headed by Raisa Mikhailouskaya and registered in Lithuania. In my opinion, this is a very useful and necessary organization. And in order to clearly prove this conclusion, let me remind you of my bookshelf.

There are two encyclopedias there. One was published before 1995, the second one — in our times. The first one comprises fairly complete and objective information; another one has been severely censored: entries about the former Prime Minister Mikhail Chyhir and long-term trade union leader Uladzimir Hancharyk have completely disappeared from its pages.

It will be difficult for our descendants to find the details about our struggle and objective documentary evidence of our era under the rubble of propaganda and lies. But in order that such evidence remained at all, centers like this are working.

It is very important when attorneys convincingly defend democratic leaders, but materials for them are prepared by lawyers, who carefully collect the necessary documents and record facts. Raisa Mikhailouskaya is one of them.

When I was working on this essay, I found a homemade magazine "My family". Several years ago 40 copies made by Raisa Mikhailouskaya's hand were handed out to almost all her relatives. It represents a fairly thorough genealogy of their family.

Raisa writes there: "In the good old days of our ancestors they passed down from generation to generation the Gospel, on the margins of which short family chronicle was recorded: who was born, when he got married, when he died..”.

Unfortunately, such homemade "Gospels" can rarely be found nowadays, especially in politics. And it is a pity, because it is so difficult to go forward without making mistakes.

ALES MIKHALEVICH



Prepared for publication on 27.08.2013

It has been long ago since I last saw so many fellow journalists as on February 28, 2011, at the first press conference, arranged by Ales Mikhalevich after his release from KGB prison.
The press conference of Ales Mikhalevich in the former BPF headquarters was not only really newsworthy, but helped everyone who was behind bars at that time. The infamous "mask show" disappeared from the KGB investigatory isolation ward.

Happy childhood

Ales Mikhalevich came out of the family of Soviet "intellectuals". His father Anatol worked at the Institute of Construction and Architecture in the field of conductive substances. His mother Ludmila worked at the Institute of Genetics and Cytology and studied gene mutations after the Chernobyl catastrophe.
On May 15, 1975 their son Ales was born. It happened in the Belarusian capital. Ales has got an elder sister. She is 5 years older than him. Her official name is Alena, but everybody calls her Lola. She is a biologist.
Like all boys, in early childhood Ales Mikhalevich dreamed of becoming a cosmonaut. However, parents explained that with his poor sight it was impossible, so later he realized that he wanted to be a linguist.
Ales studied in Minsk at mathematical school No.19, but during the last year he was transferred to the famous Humanitarian Lyceum. There he met outstanding teachers: a literary critic Piotr Vasyuchenka, a linguist Vincuk Viachorka, a social scientist Anatol Sidarevich, an economist Yury Chudzin. Naturally, everything got mixed up in his head. Having

to decide about the university, Ales was choosing between economics, political science and law. That year a political science course at BSU opened for the first time. This factor became decisive.

In 1992 Ales Mikhalevich entered the main university of the country and immediately joined the Association of Belarusian Students. Sometimes people tell that he was the founder of the organization. This is not true. The organization not only existed at that time, it had been already officially registered. It was headed by a chemistry student Aliaxey Hlushko. And Ales became the leader of ABS community at the Belarusian State University.

He became the head of the entire organization later — in 1995, and led it until 1999. His presidency is reasonably called the most outstanding period of the organization existence. There's no need to list all the events, but I should note only their extreme creativity: for example the "Thank President for bread and milk" one.

Dependent science

In 1997 Mr. Mikhalevich successfully graduated from the BSU with a Political Science degree and immediately became a postgraduate student at the Institute of State and Law of the National Academy of Sciences. Despite the fact that he had had relevant study courses in Warsaw and Oxford universities, which undoubtedly indicates a high level of education, he wasn't let to defend his thesis in his native Belarus.

The matter is that at the time Ales was a member of the Belarusian Popular Front, and the authorities very well remembered that scientific and cultural environment was once the cradle of the strongest opposition organization.

Despite the fact that the government obstruction did not help Ales Mikhalevich, after graduating he founded and headed the organization which quite successfully operated in the sphere of youth exchanges and tourism. Thanks to it, more than 2,000 young people were able to visit the countries of Western and Central Europe.

Since 2000 Mikhalevich worked in senior positions in the tourism joint venture "Arcadia". He even was the CEO of this company. After seven inspections in the company, carried out by the authorities because of his participation in the 2004 parliamentary elections, he had to leave that post.

Complex politics

In 2005, the Ministry of Economy of Belarus gave Ales Mikhalevich the accreditation to act as a crisis manager. In 2007-2008 he worked as a legal adviser of the Association of People Disabled in the Afghan War. After that he was a lawyer in the Belarusian independent trade union for two years.

At the same time with the professional activity he was engaged in social and political life. From 2003 to 2007 he was a deputy of Pukhavichy District Council of Minsk region and a coordinator of the Assembly deputies of local councils. He published an independent newspaper "Region" in Maryina Horka. He also initiated a series of steps to expand the powers of local governments.

It seems that such a list gives a possibility to feel very well in the opposition circles, but the reality turned out to be quite different.

I have repeatedly written about how I live with a feeling of some kind of a missed event. I have an impression that the authorities in the country have already changed, there is another president, and the opposition has nothing better to do than fight in internal conflicts.

Of course, this is just a sad joke, but it’s not only me who is fed up with the constant conflicts among the opposition. Don’t think that’s an exaggeration, but today I can hardly find an opposition leader, who hasn’t been accused of collaborating with the KGB and hasn’t been trying to remove his rivals.

Unfortunately, the leaders" personal ambitions very often lead to splits in political forces. For example, only professionals and very experienced people can say exactly how many social-democrat parties exist in our country at the moment.

Unfortunately, the BPF went the same way.

From 2004 to 2008 Mr. Mikhalevich was Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front party, and today, probably, there would have been no changes in this status, if in 2008 he didn’t run for the presidency. That, in my opinion, was the reason of his exclusion from the party because of "breach of party ethics and discipline". (That was an official reason.)

I’m not going to take any particular side in this conflict, because this is not the right of a journalist. I can only note that Mr. Mikhalevich is not the only opposition leader who was expelled from the organization of like-minded people. In addition, "expelling" the opponents is not the value the government opponents are struggling for.

I don't want to express any malevolence, but I often agree with those who think that the only thing that can unite the opposition is prison.

Difficult choice

I don't want to draw such a conclusion, but in December 2010 this very thing happened. In custody all of them were firstly political prisoners and only after that they were representatives of some political trends.
On January 27, 2010 Ales Mikhalevich publicly announced the beginning of his campaign for the nomination for presidency as an independent candidate. And exactly three months later, on May 27, he presented the thesis of his election program "Belarus: the strategy of evolution".
On August 24, 2010, he founded and headed the "For modernization" public movement.
On September 27, 2010, the Central Election Commission of Belarus registered his initiative group of 1795 people.
After the registration of required signatures Ales Mikhalevich received the status of a presidential candidate, but it did not save him from prosecution after the election. Many people wrote about the events of those days. I also was writing about them. So, like in the previous essay, I suggest you the following website: http://kamunikat.org/usie_knihi.html?pubid=20069
In the book called "Against the stream" the events that took place on February 28, 2011 are described in detail.
I will only note that in order not to be afraid to publicly talk about the torture of political prisoners in the KGB jail one must have COURAGE. After this statement Ales Mikhalevich was summoned to the KGB, but he did not come there and secretly left Belarus. Then the authorities announced an international search for the fugitive.
On March 23, 2011 it became known that Mr. Mikhalevich was granted political asylum in the Czech Republic. He lives in one of the EU countries at the moment.

Forced emigration

I never envy those who have fled Belarus for political reasons, although there are also some people who have nothing to do with politics. Unlike them, he emigrated, since he didn't have any other choice.

After leaving Belarus he was basically engaged in science. He was preparing a doctoral thesis, which he defended on May 10, 2013 at the Polish Academy of Sciences. He had lectured at several universities.
As expected, the focus of his attention was always the problem of torture in Belarusian prisons. On this occasion he met with the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez. Belarusian topic was very interesting to Mr. Mendez. Their communication still continues.
In addition, the first issue of "Brainstorm" magazine, edited by Mikhalevich, was published. The magazine is devoted to the future of Belarus, the reforms that need to be done in our country.
Perhaps, under the laws of the genre, it would be right to end the essay here, but I want to share with our readers some more very interesting circumstances from personal life of Mr. Mikhalevich.
It can be said that thanks to the social and political activity he met his "second half". In May 1996, Ales Mikhalevich met with Milana Shushkevich, the daughter of a singer-songwriter Mikhas Shushkevich, who has no relation to the most famous owner of this surname.
The meeting was connected with the affairs of the Belarusian Student Association. And, as Milana recalls, "there was nothing between them, just a purely working relationship". So, that was not the starting point.
The real feelings appeared later, and on August 26, 1999 they resulted in a wedding.
Milana Mikhalevich recently finished successfully her postgraduate studies. Presently, she is teaching English at one of universities in Minsk.
She gave birth to two beautiful daughters, so I’d rather put suspension points instead of the full stop at the end of this essay…

ALEXANDER MILINKEVICH



Prepared for publication on 06.02.2013

One of my good friends who has been recently ignoring all opposition activities, explained why he makes an exception for Alexander Milinkevich: "He is a smart, educated intellectual. Besides Belarusian he speaks four languages. According to it, the foreigners get the impression about our country".

From home to fate

Probably he was destined by fate to become a teacher, because his father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, brother, first and second wife were teachers too. Therefore, when later in the Grodno University, he started teaching physics, it was perfectly logical and reasonable.

Let's get back to the start. The life of Alexander Milinkevich began on July 25, 1947 in Grodno. His father, Uladzimir Baran, was born in the Piluki village which is 12 kilometers from Hrodna. For a quarter of a century he was the headmaster of the best school of this city. A geographer and an honoured teacher of the Byelorussian SSR.

His mother's name was Maria Milinkevich. Her ancestors came from the village Zubrava, which is near Bershty, and were the rebels of Kastus Kalinouski.

Alexander's brother Uladzimir is eight years older than the hero of this story. He taught physics before retirement, and is known in Hrodna as well as the former presidential candidate. By the way, in high school Uladzimir taught even his younger brother. It was him, who influenced his choice of Physics.

From boy to physicist

After graduating from school in 1965 with a gold medal, Alexander Milinkevich entered the Physics and Mathematics department of Hrodna Pedagogical Institute, which at the time was not a university yet. A high level of knowledge allowed him to enter the prestigious BSU, but he preferred his home city.

After the graduation from the institute, Alexander worked for several months at a school in Hrodna, but the thirst for new knowledge didn't let him stay there for a long time.

In 1969 he entered the post-graduate course in the Institute of Physics of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences, where he studied the theory of lasers. There he wrote his first scientific work. Later such works will amount to more than six dozen, but the first one (under the influence of the supervisor Andrey Samson) was purposefully written in the Belarusian language. Figuratively speaking, it was a tribute to the land that gave birth to him.

Let me remind you that it was done almost 44 years ago... Unfortunately, I doubt that something like this is written now. Especially when you consider physics... To put it mildly, it doesn't influence the career growth well.

And in general, in spite of the numerous attempts of the authorities to "manage" the science and to significantly limit scientific regalia by their "practical" approach, especially I have not heard about any "breakthroughs" and "inventions". Apparently, the administrative resource is not something that can provide quality here...

Approaches should be quite different. I can't say that in those years they were perfect. No. Just then they were different. Loyalty to the government was not (as today) synonymous to career prospects.

After three years of postgraduate studies (1972) Alexander Milinkevich had worked at the Institute of Physics of the Belarusian Academy of Science as a junior researcher for three and a half years and only after it presented his dissertation. The dissertation was titled "Generation of super-power laser pulses". One of his scientific opponents was Anatol Rubinau, who later got to the government.

Perhaps their views on many things radically differed even then...

After defending his thesis Milinkevich returned to alma mater, where he had worked for nearly 25 years.

In his life there was one very interesting moment. It's about his going to Africa. From 1980 to 1984 Alexander Milinkevich was the head of the Chair of Physics at the University of Setif in Algeria.

From physics to poetry

Honestly, just like the majority, I initially did not know about the "physical component" of Milinkevich's biography. Like many others, I felt that he got a historical education. And there was a reason for this. The point is that as a child he was also fond of local history and was fascinated by the real history of our country.

Over time, the interest grew into a rather strong hobby and then became important in his life.

We would like to say that even in the Institute of Physics of the Belarusian Academy of Science Milinkevich saw an eloquent example of how "a physicist turns into a poet". It's about the lectures of Professor Yury Khadyka.

He also studied things very remote from humanitarian subjects, but his lectures sounded very special. The outstanding physicist talked about ancient cultures and accompanied his stories with coloured slides. It's amazing that he, along with a group of enthusiasts from the Academy of Sciences, travelled across almost whole of Belarus in search of masterpieces of our history, religion, culture, and assembled a unique museum collection.

After returning from Algeria, Milinkevich was offered to be the author and the host of a show on Hrodna TV called "In the streets of the old town". He spent nine years on TV. The TV show was very popular.

It usually looked like this. Standing in front of the camera, Milinkevich was telling some unknown stories about Hrodna region and city, showing old postcards, prints and slides.

Speaking about history, it's necessary to recall two special events. The first one is the reparation of an old clock with the oldest mechanism in Europe on the building of Hrodna Parish Roman Catholoc Church. The second one is the discovery of the burial of the last Polish and Lithuanian King Stanislaw August Poniatowski in Vouchyn. Both events happened due to Alexander Milinkievich, and for the latter he was even awarded the Order of Rzeczpospolita.

From poems to politics

Alexander Milinkevich's electoral debut took place in 1989. The head of the famous "Pachodnia" Mikhas Tkachou ran for deputy of the

Supreme Soviet of the USSR. All democrats of Hrodna worked for him, but he lost. He gained about 30% of the votes only.

After that there were elections to the Supreme Soviet of the BSSR. This time Alexander Milinkevich took part in the elections himself. (He was a member of the "Democratic Platform" at that time.) Contrary to the decision of the Party Committee, he was balloted on the general meeting of students and teachers of his university.

In the first round he left all six competitors far behind. And in the second one he was also the first and officially got 49.7%, but the election never took place. As a result, he failed to become a deputy, but had his first experience in politics.

Then the City Council Members elected the Mayor of Hrodna. With the help of the local Democrats Siamion Domash won the elections and immediately fulfilled his promise to appoint a representative of Democrats his deputy on social issues. This person was Alexander Milinkevich.

In 1996, protesting against the anti-constitutional referendum, he left his position and then created a local organization *Ratusha* ("Town Hall').

Siamion Domash later headed the whole Hrodna region and then became one of opposition candidates at the Presidential election in 2001. Alexander Milinkevich led his campaign headquarters.

From "stability" to changes

I will not recount again, what happened then. Also, I will not express my opinion on how everything should have been done, because everyone is wise after the event. I want to note only one thing: more than once I saw S. Domash's supporters refusing "to work for Uladzimir Hancharyk". And they did that on principle.

In addition, it should be also noted that Siamion Domash was a representative of regional organizations, united in the Belarusian Association of Resource Centers (with 72 member organizations — **author's note**) at that time, and then it was pretty hard to resist the metropolitan counterparts, when they chose "the united opposition candidate" in the unofficial way.

Perhaps today it is almost impossible to find any obsessed supporter of such a way of solving issues, because immediately after the presidential campaign of 2001, its fallacy became absolutely clear.

And after that even the Belarusian opposition, which no one could suspect in staying together until that moment, was forced to getting united.

However, that time the unity failed again. In October 2005, the Congress of Democratic Forces elected Alexander Milinkevich a single opposition candidate, and in December 2005 Alexander Kozulin expressed his intention to march in a "separate column".

Its result is well known...

As you know, victories have many "fathers", but defeats have only one. As the amateur of borsch cooking Lidzia Yarmoshyna likes to put it, we witnessed another "elegant victory" in 2006, and everything was quite predictable there. Nevertheless, among the opposition the question "Who is to blame?" again became more important than "What to do?"

Alexander Milinkevich was to be blamed indeed. And you can easily imagine how heavily criticized he was. I won't mention the most venomous examples of critics, but will only tell that it is very easy to search for the guilty among others. It is much more difficult to look objectively at yourself...

In March 2006, with strong support from the Polish government, a scholarship program named after Kastus Kalinouski was created, which immediately caused quite a big scandal in the media and democratic environment.

To tell the truth, the reasons for that were considerable, but I think it's not the most important thing here. The main thing is that the program has been working quite well for many years, and those who go against the trend always have a chance not to be thrown out to the Belarusian historical dustbin.

Speaking about the cons of the program I can only say that only he who does nothing makes no mistakes.

By the way, a few weeks after the establishing of this program, Alexander Milinkevich found out the real price of the Belarusian political opposition. After the traditional rally on April 26, 2006 he was arrested and sentenced to 15 days imprisonment.

"For Freedom" movement was founded in 2006 and began to register its activists on March 25, 2006, during the Freedom Day celebrations. The organization was officially registered only at the fourth attempt, on December 17, 2008.

Alexander Milinkevich has led the movement since its foundation, and personally the author can't imagine anyone else at this position now, since there are hardly any other people, who can perform such difficult functions at the present moment.

In 2010, Alexander Milinkevich decided to fight for the presidency again and even announced that publicly on May 3, but in September he rejected the idea. As expected, the decision caused a rather strong reaction in the Belarusian society. Some supported it, others condemned it.

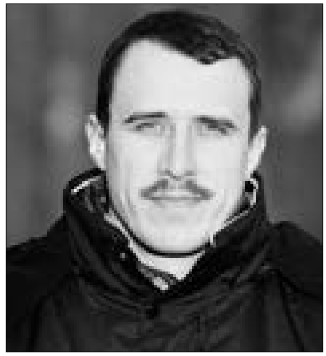
But it couldn't be otherwise. Our people can't live without trying to find out some "special points" in every issue.

I was impressed by another thing. In 2006, the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize to Alexander Milinkevich. But he didn't get above himself; on the contrary, with the help of "For Freedom" movement he established a Belarusian award "for Freedom of Thought" named after Vasil Bykau.

The award is given annually to winners at the famous writer's native village Bychki in Vitsebsk region.

It is nice when a person lives not only with slogans, but with concrete actions...

PAVEL SEVIARYNETS



Prepared for publication on 03.06.2013

Probably, if it were not for politics, he would have been a great geologist. By the time of graduation from the geological faculty of BSU Pavel Seviarynets gathered a collection of more than two thousand stones from Belarus.

Time to explore the world

Probably, Pavel Seviarynets got creativity and a desire to look for something new everywhere from his parents. And from self-sacrifice in the pursuit of truth and denying any lies.

His mother Tatsiana Seviarynets comes from Luninets (Brest region). She had worked as a teacher in different schools for almost 36 years. Unfortunately, she was fired without any reason in 2007. Allegedly she was fired for absenteeism, but everyone knew that the real reason is connected with politics. That very "absenteeism" was organized by the administration of the school, and it is very difficult to believe that it was done without an order from the "top".

Kanstantsin Seviarynets is better known as a children's writer Kastus Seviarynets. He was born in Unortsy village (Gomel region), which is only 80 kilometres from Chernobyl. The fate turned him from a headmaster of a school into a journalist, and natural talent allowed him to promote from a journalist in a regional paper and editor of the factory newspaper to an own BELTA-TASS correspondent in Vitsiebsk region quite rapidly.

Kanstantsin and Tatsiana met in the Philology Department of the Belarusian State University, where both of them had been studying. The wedding took place on April 18, 1975, and on December 30, 1976 in Orsha a boy Pavel, named after his grandfather, was born.

Kanstantsin Seviarynets was sent to Vitsiebsk in 1985, so the life of his son Pavel is connected with this city.

Time to gather stones

At first it was an interest, then — a hobby and a career choice. It's about geology.

Even as a child Pavel Seviarynets with his friend Aleh Barshchevsky (nephew of Liavon Barshchevsky and husband of Volha Karatch) worked up and polished yellow chalcedonies, which are quite widespread in Belarus. Boys made rings and jewellery with them. And in search of valuable rock crystal they even tried to build a dam on the river Luchosa (a tributary of the Western Dvina).

I mean that Pavel Seviarynets was destined by fate to become a geologist and a politician.

Surely, all of us have heard the myth that in Belarus there are no minerals, the country is poor. To put it mildly, this is not true. Among 40 countries of Europe Belarus is among the ten wealthiest in mineral resources (potash and rock salt, building materials, peat, ground water, chalk, etc.). Even speaking about the stones of which you can make jewellery and souvenirs, Belarus has something to boast of. It's enough to mention grenades, chalcedony, various kinds of quartz, amber, quartzite, flint.

At the time Pavel even had a dream to establish the production of exclusively Belarusian souvenirs that rival Ural malachite and Baltic amber.

By the way, his diploma research was entitled "The Amber of Belarus". Alexander Kazulin, who at that time was the head of BSU, helped in finishing the research. The point is, that the research was written in "tarashkevitsa" (old variant of Belarusian language), and the dean of the faculty threw it in Seviarynets" face with the words "We don't know such a language". However, after a serious talk with Kazulin, the nearly crushed research was accepted and got the "excellent" mark.

Time to make a choice

At the time the Mining Institute nearest to Belarus was situated in Leningrad, and in the time of early independence of Belarus the Department of Geography at BSU opened a geological department, which Pavel Seviarynets entered. An interesting thing here is the fact

that the very first groups were patronized by famous academician Radim Haretski. That's why 70 percent of new subjects were taught in the Belarusian language.

For Pavel Seviarynets it was especially important, since at that time he already knew that he would necessarily devote his life to promotion and revival of everything that is Belarusian.

Honestly, I don't love pathos in my essays, but in this case it is completely reasonable. I talked to Pavel for several times for various newspaper articles. One editor even expressed his wish to see the conversation with him in Russian. But this idea failed, as from the first minutes it became clear that for Pavel Seviarynets it is really difficult to speak not in Belarusian.

I don't want someone to have the impression that Pavel Seviarynets is a doltish nationalist, though, in my opinion, the latter word shouldn't have any negative connotation. Just a few months ago Kanstantsin Seviarynets presented the Russian version of his son's book "I Love Belarus".

By the way, the translation of the book "I Love Belarus" into Russian was done personally by Kanstantsin Seviarynets, whose philological specialization is Russian language and literature (as well as his mother's Tatiana, who had taught Russian at school for almost 37 years, and only her son helped her to speak Belarusian).

Time chose him

I've already written that the geographical faculty of BSU at certain time was almost the "cradle" of political freethinking. Geological department is not an exception, because apart from Pavel Seviarynets Viachaslau Siuchyk studied there.

Pavel Seviarynets finished his studies in 2000 and got the profession of engineer-geologist, specializing in "Mineral exploration", but at this time the political struggle culminated in the presidential election. Pavel supported Zianon Paznyak, so the fact that in October 1995 he joined the BPF "Revival" was quite a logical step.

In February 1997 Seviarynets headed the Minsk BPF youth fraction, and in September at the Constituent Assembly was elected co-chair of the "Young Front". Incidentally, one of the "Young Front" godfathers was Vyachaslau Siuchyk, mentioned above, who at that time was one of the leaders of the Belarusian Popular Front.

I mentioned this fact deliberately, because the longer time ago the even took place, the more people appears connected to it. The same thing might happen with the creation of the "Young Front" that once happened to a log, which was picked up by Lenin and then carried by thousands of people...

And here's another very important point. In 1994-1999 Pavel Seviarynets worked as a reporter in a number of government and commercial papers, and in 1998 began to be published in the independent press as a publicist. There's the beginning of his future books: "DJ of Renaissance" (1998), "Young Front Generation" (2002), "National Idea" (2005), "Letters from the Forest" (2007), " To a Brother" (2007). Pavel Seviarynets is a winner of the literary prize of the Belarusian Ales Adamovich PEN-center.

Painful times

From 1997 to 2004 for participation and organization of youth street performances Pavel Seviarynets got arrested more than 40 times by the KGB and police. Altogether Pavel had spent almost eight months in custody and received fines amounting to 3.5 thousand dollars.

Naturally, all of this influenced his career. From 1999 to 2004 Seviarynets was the leader of the "Young Front".

It is then when a so-called witch-hunt started in the oldest and once strongest opposition organization. Pavel Seviarynets was one of the first people expelled from the movement of the BPF "Revival" (on their own will). It is very difficult to comment from the logical point of view, but I would not be surprised if one day it turns out that someone in the security services got promoted for conflicts in the BPF...

I have often heard that the religious component in the activities of "Young Front" eventually started dominating no less than the political one. It is difficult to disagree, but I personally do not see anything extraordinary in it. Perhaps we are witnessing a kind of compensation for the lack of religious component in the society for decades.

Maybe it sounds a bit far-fetched, but in my opinion, the Christian faith was an indirect reason for Pavel Seviarynets" second corrective work sentence. I'll explain the cause. In 2005 the founding congress of the Belarusian Christian Democracy (BCD) took place, where Pavel Seviarynets (one of the party founders) got elected the co-chairman of the new structure. After the proclamation of the next presidential

elections in 2010, he led the campaign headquarters of another BCD co-founder Vital Rymasheuski.

On December 20, 2010 Pavel was arrested and placed in the KGB detention center. On May 16, 2011 he was sentenced to three years of imprisonment in an open type penitentiary — the so-called "chemistry". At first Pavel Seviarynets was promised to be sent to his native Vitsiebsk region, but then it was changed (and maybe they knew about it from the beginning...) to a penitentiary No.7 in Kuplin village (Pruzhany district, Brest region). This is where he is now working on the "Bordeaux" farm.

Perhaps this sounds debatable, but personally I believe that Seviarynets is being held behind bars today mainly because they can't do anything with his sincere faith in God.

His previous "chemistry" for organizing a protest against the results of the referendum which allowed Lukashenka to be elected the unlimited number of times he spent in the lumber village Maloye Sitna (Polatsk district, Vitsiebsk region). On May 31, 2005, Pavel Seviarynets was sentenced to three years, but then the term was reduced by a year. He was released two months before the term, which was presented by the official propaganda as a manifestation of the highest mercy.

There could have probably been be one more prison term. On April 2, 1998 during an opposition manifestation in Minsk Pavel Seviarynets was placed in the Valadarka prison for the "disruption of the concert dedicated to the consolidation of Russia and Belarus". After 2 months under the pressure of the Belarusian and international community he was released and sent on bail to Vitsiebsk. The criminal case was then closed in November 1998, without any explanation or apology.

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In June 2008, together with the poet Ryhor Baradulin and the writer Uladzimir Arlou Pavel Seviarynets became the first winner of the award "For the freedom of thought", which is presented annually by "For Freedom" movement. Of course, he has many more various awards, but I want to pay special attention to this one, since its name corresponds the essence of the hero, i.e. his constant desire of struggle for freedom of thought.

MIKOLA STATKEVICH



Prepared for publication on 07.06.2013

An essay about Statkevich should have been written long ago. But my not very good relations with Mikola have been stippnig me from doing that. During the presentation of the campaign called "Political prisoner week" it became clear to me that the private should always give way to the objective.

The path to the world

I'd like to start with a short story remembered by Mr. Statkevich in his essay that he wrote in the Blon village (Pukhavichy district, Minsk region), where he was serving his sentence in a forced labour camp in September 2006:

"It happened at one of the polygons in the Kazakh steppe, where our brigade came from the North for the firing at air targets practice. The brigade command post, for the technique which I was responsible for, was situated in a bunker with an extremely complex entrance, like a labyrinth. Once, when I urgently needed to get to the surface, a local instructor said that there is one very simple way — a dark corridor. He shut heavy armored doors behind me and I found myself in total darkness. I wanted to go back to the operating room of command post where there were green and blue lights of numerous screens. I went forward, putting my hands before me. Almost immediately I ran into a cold wall of the corridor. I turned to the other side, where I found another wall very quickly. Gradually, bumping into the walls, I chose the direction that brought me to the armored door, behind which was the sky and the sunlit steppe".

It is a symbolic remembrance.
The soldier, scientist, and politician was born on August 12, 1956 in Lyadna village, Slutsk district. His parents were teachers, so along with the science of living he immediately started to study another one — the science of thinking. The Statkevich family comes from ancient Belarusian gentry and has the "Kastsesha" coat of arms, which was used by more than 200 genera of Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania and Poland, including the ancestors of the Polish Marshal Jozef Pilsudski.
Unfortunately, Mikola's mother has died, but his father Viktar, despite his age (86 years) and many diseases (cancer, stomach ulcers), still lives in Baranavichy and is an example of courage and nobility for many people.
Every year on May 9 he is congratulated by local democratic activists. During the World War II, being a young man, he helped his father (Mikola Statkevich's grandfather) to assist partisans. He even participated in subversive actions: sawed poles with telephone wires, thus harming fascists" communications. Once they ran into a German soldier who shot at Victar, but his father shielded him from the bullet.
In early April of 2011 some online resources reported that Viktar Statkevich moved to Ukraine, where his eldest son, Alexander, lives. He really went to Ukraine, but only to attend the wedding of his grandson Andrey. There he saw his other granddaughters — Katsia and Ania — Mikola's daughters, who came to the wedding from Germany with their families. Katsia has got a PhD degree and is working for "Audi" with her husband. Ania is a housewife and a mother of small son Lionya, while her husband is engaged in business.

Military choice

Among the military officers the air defense is not considered to be the most favorable place for the service career. One can't even dream of becoming a general. It is difficult to become even a colonel. The only thing that can attract someone is almost total absence of soldiers. This is a "smart" technical army. In air defence you need thinking more than running.
Perhaps it was the main reason why Mikola Statkevich chose this type of military. At the same time his choice was also influenced by the high social prestige of the military. In addition, the cadet shoulder straps allowed a poor teacher's family not to worry about their son's welfare.

In 1973, Mikola Statkevich entered the Minsk Higher Engineering School of anti-aircraft missile defense, which he graduated from in 1978. After that he was sent to the Arctic, more precisely, to the Murmansk region.

He had served for only four years, but in that short time he managed a lot. For example, he was recognized as the best officer in his field in the union of defense that protected the entire north of the European part of the USSR. It is there where he was awarded the highest military classification — "Master".

In 1982 he returned to his alma mater, enrolled in a postgraduate course there, and a few years later he defended his thesis and began to teach there.

Political target

Probably many people, being in the position of Mr. Statkievich, would have stopped any activity. I mean, what more do you need in life? Prestigious service, high salary, good career prospects... Especially as for him personally everything went perfectly. During his service he wrote more than 60 scientific papers in the field of management, ergonomics and social psychology. He came up with several inventions, was sent to make a doctorate.

Probably today he could have been a professor and a general. Like some of those who at that time had even less "stars" on their shoulders, like the former Major Sheiman, for instance. By the way, thanks to him, I got into the history of our country. It was September 15, 1992, when the members of the newly established association of military officers, established at Statkevich's initiative, and the reserve officers took an oath of allegiance to Belarus. My signature got on the same sheet with that of Viktar Sheiman.

I can only add that this well-known name was the only exception in those lists. If we consider the entourage of the president Lukashenka, among them we can find the names of those who were "democrats" at that time, like the incumbent Minister of Information Aleh Praliaskouski.

How different their ways are...

That public action forced the government to make all officers of law-enforcement agencies swear allegiance to the independent Belarus. And then one could not imagine that in a few years they will swear again to be faithful not only to their country, but also to its president...

But let us turn to the biography of Mr. Statkevich, which is available on his website. "Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union he developed and published the concept of creating the Belarusian army, which was implemented after receiving our independence. In early 1991, in protest against the repression of demonstrators in Vilnius he left the CPSU. On August 20, 1991 he was one of the military men in Belarus to publicly oppose the coup in Moscow. At the same time he announced the creation of the Belarusian association of military (BMA), which set a target of creating the Belarusian army, protection of independence as well as historical and patriotic education of society".

I specifically advise you to pay attention to the dates. At that time nobody knew which side would win. But we can clearly assert another thing: soldier Mikola Statkevich knew very well what awaits him personally and his associates in case of defeat.

There is another important point to be mentioned. In 1993, Mikola Statkevich opposed the Collective Security Treaty with the warring countries (Armenia, Tajikistan, etc.), under which Belarus had to send its soldiers to foreign wars. For this he was dismissed from military service. It was just a month before the planned presentation of his doctoral thesis.

Following a broad public campaign in support of Mr. Statkevich, the Belarusian Parliament ratified the Collective Security Treaty, but with the condition not to send our soldiers to "hot spots".

Party kaleidoscope

I know the opposing opinions of different people about what happened then and is happening now in the Belarusian Social Democratic environment. But my sketch is biographical. So I try to avoid any comments. I confine myself to a statement of facts and a remark: Belarusian Social Democrats can be called record-holders in terms of the number of internal splits. And every time one of the pitfalls was the problem of leadership.

Mikola Statkevich has been in this camp almost from the very beginning of its existence, when Belarusian Social Democratic Gramada was created at the initiative of Mikhas Tkachou in March 1991. The chairman was Mikhail Tkachou, and his first deputy was Aleh Trusau. A year later, after the premature death of Mr. Tkachou, Mr. Trusau became the head of the party and led it until the summer of 1995.

In 1995, instead of Aleh Trusau, Mikola Statkevich was elected the chairman of BSDH. In 1996, there was a union of Social Democratic Gramada with National Freedom Party — as a result Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Gramada) was created. Mr. Statkevich became chairman of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Gramada).

In 2005 there was another attempt to unite and yet another split. BSDP (Gramada) was formed, and Alexander Kozulin was elected its leader. Currently BSDP (Gramada) is headed by Irina Veshtard. Supporters of Mikola Statkevich formed the organizing committee for the revitalized Belarusian Social Democratic Party (Narodnaya Gramada) and elected him their chairman.

Thorny path

During his political activity Mr. Statkevich was more than 30 times subject to administrative detention, which ended in one-day imprisonment or a fine. Three times criminal cases were initiated against him, in two of them the punishment was not conditional.

In 2005, together with Pavel Seviarynets he was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment for organizing a peaceful demonstration against the falsification of referendum. According to the results of this referendum, the president won the right to stay in power for an unlimited number of terms.

While serving his sentence in a forced labour camp Mr. Statkevich worked as an electrician at a plant in Baranovichi, then as a fitter on a farm. In 2006, an international organization "Amnesty International" recognized Mikola Statkevich a prisoner of conscience. In July 2007, he was granted an amnesty.

In 2009, the "European Coalition" Congress, headed by Mikola Statkevich since 2003, nominated him as a candidate for the presidency in 2010. On December 19, 2010 he participated in the demonstration on October Square and Independence Square. After the break up of the demonstration he was arrested.

On May 26, 2011 in the Leninsky district court of Minsk Judge Ludmila Hrachova issued the sentence for him — 6 years in a maximum security prison. For the time being Mikola Statkevich is the only former presidential candidate who remains behind bars.

I won’t describe all the details of his arrest and serving his sentence. I advise you to go to the virtual library and find my books

"Against the stream" and "Life after prison". You can find them here: http://kamunikat.org/usie_knihi.html?pubid=20069.

There you can find precise information about all that Mikola's wife Maryna Adamovich told about that.

The main thing that determines Statkevich's political fate is that under any circumstances he sticks to the truth. He is suffering for that nowadays. Consequently, he rejects to sign repentance letters and appeal for pardon.

VINCUK VIACHORKA



Prepared for publication on 10.10.2013

If you try to formulate the guiding principle in Vincuk Viachorka's life, it is perhaps that he always starts something new. Even more importantly, he goes on seeking if what he found once has been lost. Besides, Vincuk Viachorka is one of the most cultured politicians in Belarus. It is very hard to imagine him in prison, though the first time he had found himself there was thirty years ago and now he is only 52.

Early Life

"I was born in Bierascie on 7 July 1961, the same day as the famous Belarusian poet Janka Kupala and Marc Chagall. It is also St John's Day according to the Julian calendar, when our ancestors celebrated *Kupalle* (Midsummer Night).

My father Ryhor was an economist and my mother Alaucina worked as a teacher and editor. Unfortunately, my father is no longer with us, but my mother, thank God, still leads a very active life and is happy to take part in Belarusian social and cultural events.

Until 1974 we lived in Bierascie, where I went to secondary school No. 1, which now offers special training in maths. The "upper echelons of power" acknowledged my father's potential as a researcher and fieldworker (he specialised in fixed assets and banking) and offered him the position of Piotr Masherau's economic advisor.

My father held rather high posts, but I would like to point out that he made a career in the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Party due to his profound knowledge and experience rather than careerism in the communist party ranks. The Soviet regime wouldn't have lasted long without true professionals.

My younger sister Alena, unlike myself, followed in our father's footsteps and became a professor of economics.

I was quite young when I set my priorities and made up my mind to choose linguistics as a career.

I studied in Bierascie until I was thirteen and finished school in Minsk. I had all excellent grades except for one B in Russian.

I did not belong to the group of "golden youths", that is, the children of privileged party bosses. I was just disgusted by them. In high school I took summer jobs as a blue-collar worker at a printing house and bought a wireless and a tape recorder with my own money.

I went to study at the School of Philology at university, the department of "Belarusian and Russian languages and literatures" as there was no purely Belarusian specialisation at the time. It was my conscious choice, as I had had a strong feeling of national identity since I was twelve or thirteen and clearly realised that Belarus was not part of Russia.

There was no Internet yet, so I began listening to foreign radio stations, at first just because I was fond of rock music, and then because I was interested in alternative political information. In Bierascie I could listen to the Polish Radio only and in Minsk I tuned in to the BBC, *The Voice of America* and Radio Liberty, which were constantly being jammed.

I remember well that on a Friday night while I was doing my homework in technical drawing, which I hated, about 1 a.m. I heard a few Belarusian words through the jammers and realised that it was the Belarusian service of Radio Liberty.

My father secretly gave me the "white TASS" to read — these were restricted analytical reports about the situation in different countries, including Poland and Czechoslovakia. I knew a lot about the real state of things.

Siarhiej Dubaviec, who was a bit older than me, also allowed me to use his library card to go to the Lenin Library, where schoolchildren were not admitted at all. In the Belarusian section I read books like *National Democrats at Work* — libellous writings of the 1930s, from which I tried to extract real information about the events of the time. I also read Aleś Bozhka, Leanid Proksha and Vaclau Mackievich, who were employed to produce pro-communist libel in the 1970s. I found some interesting facts in their attacks on the Belarusian émigré community. For example, I learnt from one of these books that the

Belarusian Democratic Republic had the *Pahonia* coat of arms and the white-red-white flag.’

The Dissent Begins

When I was in my second year at university, a group of likeminded students got together. It included Siarhiej Dubaviec, me and Siarzhuk Sokalau-Vojush, who was then just Sokalau (Vojush is his mother’s maiden name). He was one year my junior at university because he had failed the first time he applied to university as he deliberately chose not to belong to the Young Communists" League. As for me, I was a YCL member, but instead of a red badge I wore a red-and-green one that I had painted myself. I wanted to show that I belonged to the Belarusian YCL, which was a naïve attempt to demonstrate my national identity. 99% of young people belonged to the YCL at the time. The supervisor of our year tried to make me the YCL leader but I refused in no uncertain terms.

Between 1979 and 1981 Siarhiej Dubaviec, Siarzhuk Sokalau and I produced a self-made newsletter called *Lustra Dzion* (The Mirror of Days). It was anti-Soviet and supported the idea of national independence. We made four typewritten issues, twenty to twenty five copies of each. We typed them on a typewriter of the Internal Security Troops of the unit where Siarhiej Dubaviec was doing his military service. The secret service tried to find where they were printed but it couldn’t occur to them that we did it right under their noses. Things got messed up just once at the *Palimir* plant in Navapolacak, where we delivered *Lustra Dzion* through Siarzhuk Sokalau’s brother-in-law. Siarzhuk was interrogated and the KGB pressurised his father, who worked as a teacher, causing serious damage to his poor health. They had suspicions but did not have any proof. They failed to find the source.

At that time we created an underground press and were ready to start a new publication. Ihar Hiermianchuk, who was employed at the printing and publishing works, took enormous risks to smuggle the types. The masthead was already cast in metal. I kept the small press at my place for a while. We were very careful to keep secret what we were doing, but it was not the only thing that saved us. Someone must have been very keen not to ruin the image of Belarus as the "most peaceful republic of the USSR" so the case was hushed up. Besides, our printing work slowed down when Ihar Hiermianchuk was called up.

We realised that there was a danger of remaining in our narrow circle, so we decided to engage in legal activities to promote the Belarusian language and culture and thus find more supporters. For example, we came up with an idea to celebrate traditional Belarusian festivals such as *Kalady* (Yuletide) in the streets of Minsk. The authorities couldn't accuse us of any subversive activities. After all, it was traditional culture, and the national government by definition couldn't prevent the revival of national heritage.

And so we did. My acquaintance with the artists Alaksiej Marachkin and Mikola Kupava helped us to establish contacts with students of the Institute of Theatre and Art and widen the circle of likeminded people. Among those who joined in our celebrations were Siarzhuk Cimochau, Ihar Marachkin, Henik Lojka, Hienadź Macur, Andrej Radzivonau and Janka Miedźviadziou. There were also students of philology, such as Iryna Kruk (now Marachkina), Siarhiej Zaprudzki and Alena Amielchyc (now Anisim), mathematicians whom we got to know through Aryna Pouzik, who became my wife, physicists and many others. And of course Larysa Simakovich, who I met by chance at a lecture in the art museum. She asked questions in Belarusian, which was a true sign that she was one of us. It turned out that she was a composer and a choral coach, which meant we would be taught to sing by a professional.

This is how the group *Majstrounia* was born. We celebrated our first *Kalady* on 7 January 1980, singing to passers-by in the street. We also called on the famous writer Uladzimir Karatkievich, who lived at the corner of Marx and Engels Streets. As we were leaving, we were detained by the law enforcement. They did not know what to do with us: some strange-looking young people were carrying a Christmas star, leading somebody in a mask of a goat and speaking Belarusian.

To put it in a nutshell, they let us go because Uladzimir Karatkievich knew a colonel in Minsk Law Enforcement Department. We proceeded to a house in Surhanau Street where there are still a lot of artists living, singing Christmas carols as we went.

That was baptism by fire for *Majstrounia*.

The Deputy Dean of the School of Philology at the Belarusian State University cared about the promotion of amateur groups and allowed us to have our meetings in the building of the School of Philology. We met there for two years and then went to the Palace of Trade Unions.

We performed right in the streets of Minsk, amazing the public with our fluent Belarusian. *Majstrounia* created an informal university of Belarusian studies. The numbers of our supporters were growing.
Majstrounia was crushed after we staged a protest against the demolition of the historic Miensk City Theatre, where the first Belarusian opera had been performed. There is now a new building constructed in its place, called the *Europa* hotel. On 13 June 1984 thirteen young people held the first-ever protest in the recent history of Belarus against ruining the national heritage, only to be faced with pressure from the state.
Majstrounia gradually joined another group called *Talaka*. The romantic and committed Siarzhuk Vitushka and the vigorous and brave Viktar Ivashkievich played the leading role in *Talaka*. Unfortunately, neither of them is with us any more. Another leading figure was Aleś Susha.
There were only thirty of us in 1985, but a few years later hundreds of people throughout Belarus joined us.'

The Beginnings of the Belarusian People's Front

"We covered all the expenses from our own pockets, contributing a certain part of our students" allowances to buy photo paper, films, developer and fixing salt. We also set up an emergency fund. It allowed us to pay the fines we were sentenced to in 1985 for celebrating *Kupalle* in the museum where Siarzhuk Sokalau worked.
My photo equipment worked non-stop. So did my friends" photo laboratories. These days you can find everything on the Internet (for example, the Third Constituent Charter of the Belarusian Democratic Republic), but first someone had to get these documents from the restricted access collections in libraries, photograph them and make multiple copies.
We established contacts with the heirs of the ideas of the Belarusian Democratic Republic in Vilnia (Vilnius) like Liavon Luckievich and Zośka Vieras. Hundreds of metres of photo films with the early 20th century press and books from archives were brought from Vilnia. For example, among them was Zośka Vieras's private archive. The only external aid that we received was fifty roubles for the emergency fund from our Ukrainian counterparts.
It was a time when independent cultural and educational groups like *Pachodnia* in Horandia were being set up all over Belarus. University

graduates who had worked closely together with *Talaka* went to their assigned jobs in different regions of Belarus. Later they created the foundations for the BPF.

I graduated from university in 1983 and went on to study at postgraduate courses. I enjoyed doing research into the history of the standard Belarusian language in Western Belarus during the interwar period. However, so far my greatest achievement as a researcher has been the modern codification of the classical spelling tradition introduced by Branislau Tarashkievich, which I came to call *tarashkievica*.

My colleagues Źmicier Sauka, Źmicier Sańko, Juraś Bushlakou and I had been preparing *Bielaruski Klasychny Pravapis* (Classical Belarusian Spelling) for years before we published it in 2005.

After doing my postgraduate course I began teaching at the pedagogical university. It was on the eve and at the beginning of *perestroika* and at that eventful time I combined my studies and teaching with public and political work.

In 1990 Kastuś Tarasau and Uladzimir Krukouski, who held important positions at Spadchyna (Heritage) journal, reorganised from *Pomniki Historyi i Kultury* (Historical and Cultural Monuments), offered me a job at *Spadchyna*. The editor-in-chief was the writer Ivan CHyhrynau. A new epoch was dawning and we did all we could to bring it closer. The team of *Spadchyna* was able to transform the journal into an important tool of education in the field of Belarusian history and culture that until then had been spread through our photocopies. Now we had a forum. *Spadchyna* published hundreds of historical, literary and philosophical texts from the classical non-Soviet Belarusian tradition.

Now that we are living in the age of the Internet, *Spadchyna* is being digitised for the young who know words like "website", "resource" and "Facebook" better than the word "library".

The same year I accepted Uladzimir Kolas's proposal to found an independent Belarusian school. At first it was a Sunday course, which soon grew to become the Belarusian Humanities Lyceum. I am proud to have been among its founders. I worked there for many years until I was elected the head of the BPF Party. At the lyceum I also produced a course of lectures on the history and culture of the Belarusian language.

When I was still going to school in Bierascie my classmates had nicknamed me Politician because I had been reading newspapers,

known all the news and remembered the names of many politicians, including foreign ones.

This must have influenced my priorities in life.

Right until the Belarusian People's Front was created there had been an anti-communist and pro-sovereignty underground Group for Independence. We worked in close cooperation with Lithuanians and had a clear understanding that Belarusians should also take a path forward.

In September 1988 Aleś Susha and I were sent to the reservist training in Marjina Horka. Perhaps the idea was to exclude us from political life, but it turned the other way round. In the spring of that year Viktar Ivashkievich, Aleś Bialacki and I had come to a conclusion that Belarus needed something like *Sajudis* in Lithuania. We thought that the Constituent Assembly of the *Martyraloh* Society to Commemorate Victims of Communist Repression gave us a window of opportunity.

Aleś Susha and I surreptitiously escaped to attend the assembly dressed in our uniforms of lieutenants, which immediately caused whispers, "The army is with us!" The meeting showed that Zianon Paźniak had the same idea. In my speech I suggested creating something bigger than educational institutions. Zianon Paźniak put to the vote a proposal to create an Organising Committee of the Belarusian People's Front *Adradzheńnie* (Revival) that he had drafted earlier and that had received Vasil Bykau's support.

This was the beginning of a new age in my life. Until 2009 I dedicated the biggest part of myself to the BPF, going through thick and thin with it. I was not elected to the Supreme Soviet in 1990. I got the majority of votes, but the communist authorities claimed the turnout at three polling stations in Valadarski Street to be lower than it in fact was. That is why I had to do ordinary "fieldwork". While the BPF faction was engaged in active parliamentary work, Viktar Ivashkievich, Aleś Bialacki, Aleś Susha and I did organisational work and were responsible for public relations.

In 1999 it became absolutely clear that Zianon Paźniak couldn't promptly react to the developments in Belarus from exile or create coalitions that were a must for opposing the Lukashenka regime. The BPF's influence in society was dwindling. In the end my friends talked me into taking over as the BPF leader.

Those who are envious and call this post a sinecure are deeply wrong. To be in charge of a political party if it truly opposes the regime rather than imitates opposition activities means constant self-denial. It involves stress and danger on a daily basis. You seldom see you family and have no spare time by definition; add here unending arrests. On top of that after being an opposition party leader you become unemployable.

I was happy when my supporter Liavon Barshcheuski agreed to become the BPF Party leader in 2007, but it turned out later that I shouldn't have been so optimistic.'

The Beginning of a Future

"When I was still at university I married a girl from my former class, Aryna by name. She came from the family of the professor of Technological Institute Paladzi Pouzik. We had three children: Radaslava, Francishak and Ruzhana. All of them got their education only in Belarusian, which means that I had plenty of experience of dealing with bureaucrats in education. My children even went to Belarusian-language kindergartens.

Now Radaslava is a lawyer and a businesswoman. Francishak is a journalist who specialises in new types of media. Ruzhana is still studying at Belarusian-language Grammar School No. 23.

Unfortunately, last year Aryna met her untimely death.

But let us get back to political matters. If you remember the Soviet times, in 1985 when *perestroika* was just beginning hardly anyone could imagine that one day the Soviet Union would collapse.

However, we believed in it. So do we believe that the current regime has very similar prospects. I have always been faithful to the Belarusian idea. It is impossible to eradicate it completely. The Russian imperial authorities, communists and Nazis tried to, but in vain. The Belarusian idea is still in danger but I am convinced that the hideous experiment we are witnessing now is bound to fail.

What my generation of fighters for Belarus did is not lost. One day it will be revived again.'

Common Photo Album

Military training.

Family (wife Tatstsiana, son Mikhail).

The first car.

Political family (Andrey Sannikau (left), Iryna Krasouskaja, Stanislau Shushkevich)









MIKHAIL MARYNICH





Near the Christmas tree.
In a restaurant.
At the pool.
In Germany





IRYNA GRUSHAVAYA





Talking to Ales Adamovich. Starting his activities. Happy holidays. Childhood.





HIENADZ HRUSHAVY







Formal
Early
Casual.

GALINA SIAMDZIANAVA



Political turbulence.
Student dreams.
Family promenade.
Calling of the spring.







VINCUK VIACHORKA

In childhood.
In the army.
Wedding.
With his wife Tamara









SIARHIEJ ANTONCHYK



With his family.
With Lech Walesa.
With fellow-thinkers.





LIAVON BARSHCHEUSKI



In the center of attention. In the center of competition. In the center of the family.





VALANTSINA SVIATSKAYA





With her father.
With her mother.
With her daughter Katsiaryna



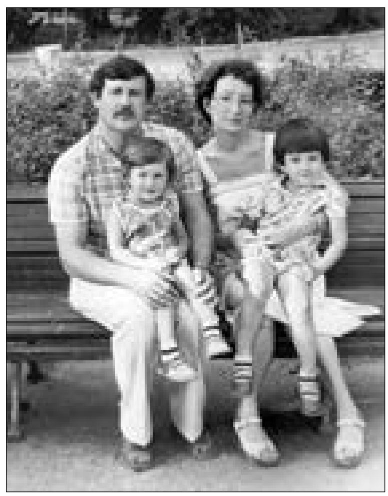
RAISA MIKHAILOUSKAYA



Court.
Wedding.
Childhood.
With her parents.







ENIRA BRANITSKAYA



Mother.
With her daughter Volha.
A teacher.





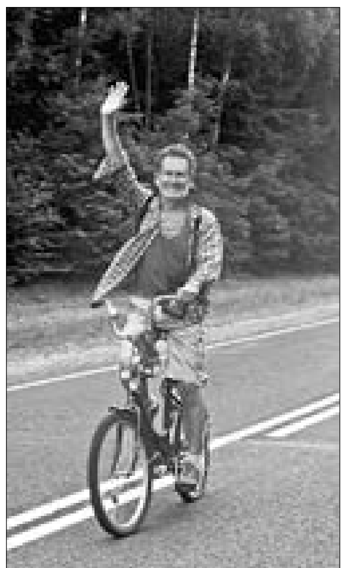
NINA STUZHYNSKAYA







A boy.
A student.
Father.
An ecologist.



VALERY DRANCHUK



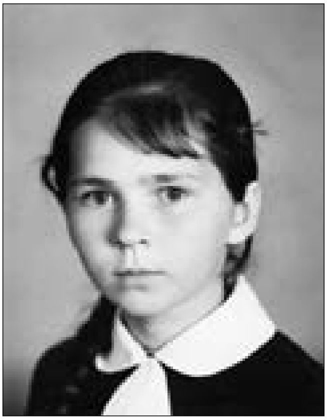




A politician.
Son.
A military student.
A fighter



ANDREJ KLIMAU









School.

After the university.

Childhood (with a doll).
Politics.

ANTANINA KAVALIOVA





Early in life.
Early in work.
Early in politics (with Vasil Bykau).



STANISLAU SHUSHKEVICH



A young man. A student. A school boy.





ALIAKSANDR JARASHUK







A boy.
Father.
A junior sergeant.

ALIAKSANDR SASNOU







At school.
Fishing.
On holidays.

LEANID SINITSYN



Having a rest..
At the wedding.
With his family





MIKHAIL PASTUKHOU

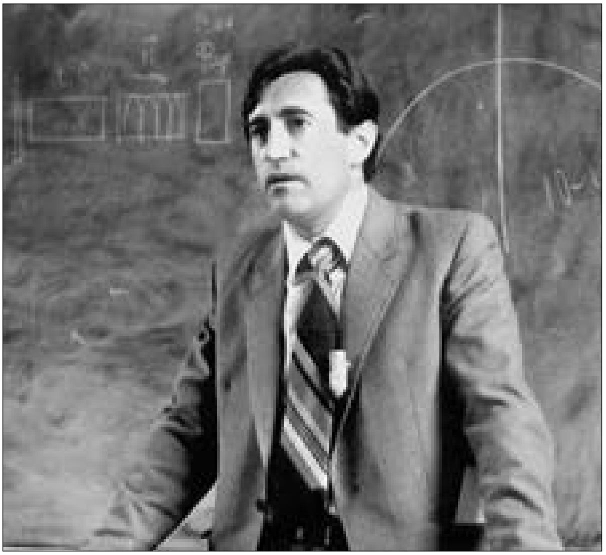


A school boy (right). Major General. Politician.





VALERY FRALOU





With formulas.
With his wife.

ALIAKSANDR VAITOVICH



Military student.

Colonel General.



PAVEL KAZLOUSKI





Childhood.
Marines.
Happiness



ALIAKSANDR KAZULIN



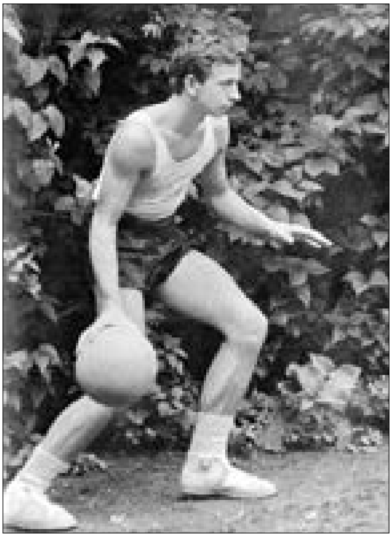


A child.
Mother (with her son Ihar).
A Snow Maiden.
Wife.





INA KULEJ



Road to sports.
Road to music.
Road to politics.





ALEXANDR MILINKEVICH



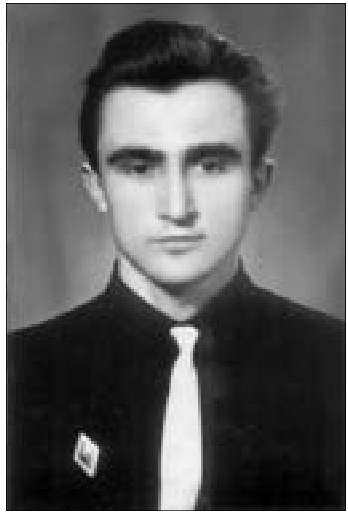
A military student.
Major.
Father.





MIECHYSLAU GRYB





Elderly son.
Young professional.
Young grandfather.



ULADZIMIR GANCHARYK





With his son.
With a niece.
With his wife.



STANISLAU BAGDANKEVICH







For good work.
Good work.
First awards.

VASIL LIAVONAU





In early childhood.
A young banker.
A young soldier.



MIKHAIL CHYGIR

A young lyricist.
A young physicist.





YURY KHADYKA



At the presentation of the children’s book "Daddy’s Notes".

At the rink with his wife Maryna and daughter Alena.

A street theater in the Ukrainian village of Benkava Vishnia.

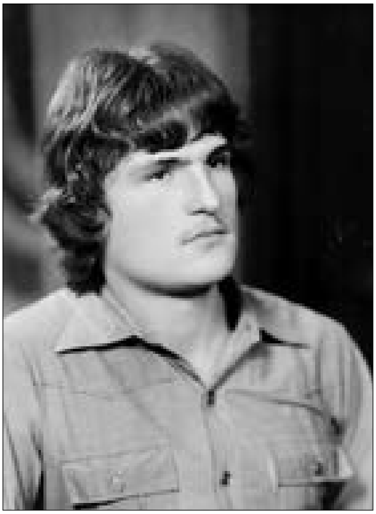
King of the festival "Battle of Orsha – 2005".

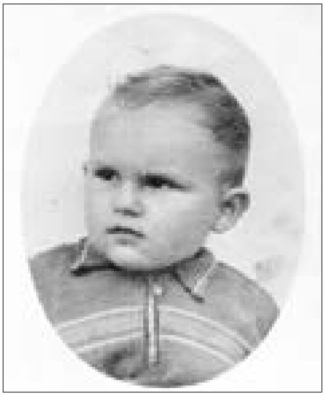






ANDREJ KHADANOVICH





A young man.
A boy.
A soldier



MIRASLAU KOBASA





Childhood. Dancing. Master. Father





IRYNA VIDANAVA









At the radio.

At a parade
with her father.

Congratulated
by Anatol Butevich.

With her husband
Aliaksiej, sister Natallia,
brother-in-law Aleh
and nephew Matsviej.

ZHANNA LITVINA





A baby.
During a break
In America, with Dzianis Talpieka.



SIARHIEJ ANTUSIEVICH







In childhood.
Sad songs.
Mother's last photo.

IRYNA ZHYKHAR

A young researcher.
Excavations.
Outdoors.







ALEH TRUSAU





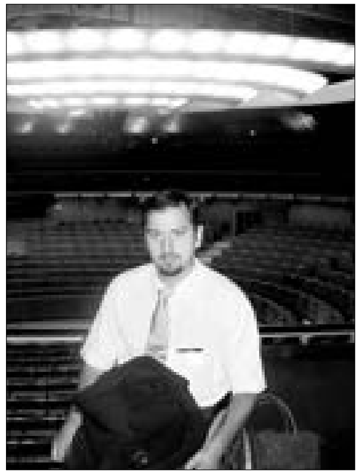
A human rights activist.
Mother (with her daughter Katsiaryna).
The family.
A child.





ALENA TANKACHOVA





Near Niagara Falls.
In Strasburg.
In Switzerland.



SIARHIEJ DRAZDOUSKI





While traveling.
In childhood.
At work.



ANTON ASTAPOVICH



Grandson.
Grandfather.
Professor.
A tourist.







ALEH MANAJEU





With his mother.
With a guitar.
With his daughter.



SIARHIEJ MATSKIEVICH





Afghanistan.
School.
Belarusfilm.



ALEH VOLCHAK





With a cat.
With a crab.
With a police officer



ALEH HULAK





With parents. With his wife. With his family. With traditions.





ULAD VIALICHKA



With friends Uladzimir Tsesler and Jauhien Lipkovich.

With his grandson.

With his wife.





ULADZIMIR MATSKEVICH





During a training course.
During a tour.
During a meeting (with Aliaksandr Milinkievich and Ivonka Survila)



TATSIANA REVIAKA







Wedding.
In his youth.
Spring.
Trial.



ALES BIALIATSKI





With a philosopher Valiantsin Akudovich.
With a poet Hienadz Buraukin.
With his wife Volha.
With a writer Uladzimir Arlou
and a musician Zmitsier Vajtsiushkievich.





ULADZIMIR NIAKLIAJEU





On his own.

With Ales Arestovich.

With President of the European Parliament
(left to right) Martin Schulz
and Siarhiej Skrabiets



MIKHOLA STATKEVICH





The first search.
The pending court.
With parents.



IRYNA KHALIP







With voters.
With his son Danka.
With his wife Iryna.

ANDREJ SANNIKAU





The first years of life.
The first release.
A gentleman's duty.



ZMITSIER DASHKIEVICH



The Youth Front’s 15th anniversary.
The action on February14th.
The autograph on her book





NASTA PALAZHANKA







Wedding.
With his wife Sviatlana.
With son Artsiom.
At work.



ANATOL LIABIEDZKA





The political choice.
Life choices.

ALES MIKHALEVICH





The beginning.
Timber harvesting.
A tea pot at the Detention Center.



PAVEL SEVIARYNETS





The choice.
In Brest.
Family.



VITAL RYMASHEUSKI

With his wife Galina and his son Vitaut near the Gate of Dawn in Lithuania.



VIACHASLAU SIUCHYK





With her daughter Galia.

The adolescence.

With Lubomir Regak, a former Ambassador of Slovakia in Belarus, his wife Dana, and his son Kanstantsin (extreme right).

With her husband Valiantsin Lukashou (a scholar).





GALINA SIUCHYK

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Information and Op-Ed Publication

Aliaksandr **Tamkovich**

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